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THE HAND OF FATE; OR THE WRECK OF TWO LIVES.

BY IRABELLA SOUTHWORTH,

AUTHOR OF "A DESPERATE VENTURE," ETC., ETC.



AGAINST THE BUTTRESS OF THE BRIDGE WAS LEANING A WOMAN'S GRACEFUL FORM.

The Hand of Fate;

OR,

The Wreck of Two Lives.

BY ARABELLA SOUTHWORTH,

AUTHOR OF "WHAT SHE COST HIM," "A DESPERATE VENTURE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

"Lord of himself! that heritage of woe!"

STANDING far back on emerald terraces, its acres of velvety lawn sloping down to the banks of the gleaming Hudson, with the grand old Catskills looming up in the distant background, is Trevor Hall, the envy and admiration of neighbors and strangers alike.

It is indeed a magnificent old mansion, having been built something more than a half century ago, in the style of good Queen Anne, and abounds in stained glass windows, rambling corridors, quaint staircases and suites of spacious apartments furnished in a most luxurious and costly, though somewhat old fashioned manner.

It is built at the head of a series of terraces, around which are planted groups of shrubs, rhododendrons, azaleas, laurels, and every variety of ornamental trees, and the rippling of fountains here and there, and the gleam of statues through the foliage, but serve to increase the general air of magnificence that pervades the whole atmosphere of Trevor Place.

But though the splendid mansion is replete with every luxury; though the woods swarm with game and the streams abound with trout; though the neighborhood is one of almost unequaled beauty, yet the master of this wide-spread domain seldom visits his ancestral home, but leaves it in the care of a few old servants, while a trusted steward manages the property. He may be heard of gambling recklessly at Homburg, shooting big game in Africa, traveling in the Holy Land, or flirting with renowned beauties at Paris or Vienna; but he is almost a stranger in his own home, and many of his neighbors have never beheld him face to face.

A heavy shadow rests upon Trevor Hall, known but to few, but when those few who possess the key to the secret of St. John Trevor's prolonged absence from his home hear him spoken of, they shake their heads and mutter, "Poor fellow!" with bated breath and mysterious glances.

An air of neglect hangs over the beautiful place; a strange, weird feeling oppresses the chance visitor, as of some unseen presence brooding over the scene, which recalls to mind Hood's words, "The place is haunted!" Haunted it is, but by the ghosts of vanished joys; by the presence of an ever-abiding horror, not by spirits from another world!

A lovely October day was drawing to a close; the last gleams of the declining sun were brightening the tree-tops and tinting the wild asters and golden-rod upon the roadsides with renewed glory.

A solitary horseman was riding slowly along one of the roads leading from the village.

He was a man of middle age, with an honest, weather-beaten visage, keen dark eyes, and carefully trimmed hair and whiskers, fast turning gray.

Stopping to gaze at the gorgeous sunset, he became aware of a horse's hoofs behind him, and turning his head, perceived a gentleman riding a magnificent black steed, who evidently wished to overtake him.

"Well, colonel," he exclaimed, in a pleasant, genial voice, as the new-comer reined in his horse by his side, "I did not know you had returned from the city. I had a letter about you from Mr. Trevor this morning."

"What did he say?" eagerly asked the other.

"Has he any objection to letting the cottage?"

"Well," replied his friend, meditatively, "I cannot say that he has no objection to the letting of the cottage—you know how he

bates the idea of strangers settling here; but he is content to waive his objections, as the gentleman is a friend of yours."

"Hardly that," answered the colonel, laughing, "seeing that I have never seen Admiral Vaughan in my life. He is an old acquaintance of my mother's, and I have met his granddaughter several times," a slight flush coloring his bronzed cheek as he spoke.

"He has two granddaughters, he tells me," rejoined the other, with difficulty suppressing a low, amused whistle as he caught sight of the stately Colonel Fane absolutely blushing like a school-girl.

"Yes, I believe he has," rejoined Fane, carelessly, "but I have only met Miss Vaughan. The other is still at school."

"Well, we shall soon know all about them," replied the agent, "for Admiral Vaughan wishes to take possession of the cottage as soon as possible. But I must be off, and your horse is getting fidgety."

"You had better ride home and dine with me, Griffiths. My mother will be pleased to see you, and you can give her the latest particulars relating to the admiral."

"Thanks, colonel," said the other. "But my riding-dress is hardly fit for Mrs. Fane's drawing-room. However, I will go home with you, if you like."

And the two men were soon riding leisurely in the direction of the colonel's home, by name, Fairview.

It was a large, rambling house, built of white stone, lavishly ornamented with richly-carved beams of oak; narrow lattice windows; a heavy porch of carved oak; a huge door, large and massive enough for a cathedral; a spacious hall, and a staircase wide enough to turn "a coach and six" in, whose shallow, slippery steps led to a handsome picture-gallery and splendid apartments, one of which contained the plumed bedstead in which tradition affirmed the "Father of his country" had slept.

Such was the home which Laurence Fane had inherited in right of his mother, who had been granddaughter and sole heiress of Squire Pryce.

Mrs. Fane had when very young married, rather against the wishes of her grandfather. Her husband had died fighting gallantly at the head of his troop at Bull Run, and his only son, Laurence, had followed his father's example, and graduated from West Point.

On Mrs. Fane's succeeding to her grandfather's estates, she had persuaded her son, who idolized his mother, to leave the army and settle down upon their estate on the Hudson.

The two gentlemen rode round to the stable-yard, where Colonel Fane's horses were lodged in a most luxurious manner, and throwing the reins to a groom who was lounging over the door of one of the horse-boxes, calmly chewing a straw, the colonel and his guest crossed the paved yard, and entered an arched passage, lighted with lancet windows and spread with tiger-skins, which led to his mother's apartments.

An exquisite room, furnished with high-art furniture, a dado of carved black oak, and pale olive-green walls, forming an excellent background for Venetian mirrors; stands of costly china; priceless gems of art in frames of dead gold; curtains, lounges and chairs covered with olive-green brocade, exquisitely worked with leaves and grasses in all the varied autumn tints; a glowing fire lighting up the room, and gleaming upon the silver and china of the Queen Anne tea-service, which stood upon a tiny table drawn close to the hearth; the air heavy with the odor of tuberose and hothouse flowers, which filled the jardiniere; and a dainty creature, richly dressed in the darkest green velvet, relieved at throat and wrists by old rose point, reclining in a low chair, her white hand glittering with jewels, holding a large screen of peacock feathers between the glowing blaze and her fair cheek.

"Why, mother, you are all in the dark," exclaimed the colonel, as he entered the room.

"Are we too late for some tea? I have brought Mr. Griffiths to see you."

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Griffiths," said Mrs. Fane, rising from her low chair and extending her soft white hand, which the agent took respectfully.

"Lance, dear"—to her son, who was lighting the cluster of wax candles upon the lofty mantelpiece—"ring the bell, and Mathews will bring us some tea. You will stay and dine, Mr. Griffiths?" she said, for the agent and Mrs. Fane were the best of friends; the high-bred lady esteeming him for his many excellent qualities and his utter absence of all pretense; while the bluff, honest-hearted man almost worshipped the beautiful high-born woman, and would have gladly laid down his life to do her service.

"Thank you, Mrs. Fane," he said; "but my riding-jacket and muddy boots would be altogether out of place in your drawing-room."

"Such nonsense, Mr. Griffiths!" laughed the lady. "You always will forget that I have been a soldier's wife, and used to roughing it. Pray stay and amuse us a little this evening. I have been so dreadfully dull while Lance was in New York," she added, looking proudly and with a smile of maternal tenderness up in her son's face as she spoke.

They formed a strong contrast. No one could have imagined that that dainty thing, in her sweeping velvet robes, with the fluffy little curls upon her white brow, her golden hair untouched by time, the luster of her deep blue eyes undimmed, and the pure rose and white of her complexion so fresh and fair, could be the mother of the tall, stately, soldierly man who stood upon the rug before her.

Laurence Fane was the model of a high-bred man. He was tall, broad-chested, with a noble bearing, upright carriage, which owed nothing to the drill sergeant. His eyes were bright and keen, of a brilliant hazel, and his short fair hair and heavy blonde mustaches contrasted oddly with his bronzed complexion. He had haughty features and a ringing, authoritative voice, as of one used to command.

Such was Laurence Fane, late of the — Regiment, the idol of his proud mother's heart and the admiration of the fair belles in the neighborhood.

While they sipped the fragrant tea from the dainty porcelain cups, Mrs. Fane eagerly questioned Mr. Griffiths concerning her old friend, Admiral Vaughan.

"I dare say the dear old thing is greatly altered," she said, meditatively; "it is almost twenty years since I saw him. It was soon after his poor son was killed at Gettysburg, and a mutual sorrow drew us together," she added softly, a tear dimming her bright eyes for a moment as she remembers the lonely grave at Greenwood, where the husband of her youth slept his last long sleep.

"It is poor Roy Vaughan's daughter whom you have met in the city, Lance," she said to her son. "She is a charming girl, my son tells me, Mr. Griffiths. It will be quite too delightful for me to have so pleasant a companion. I quite long to see my old friend again."

"The admiral mentioned having two granddaughters who would accompany him here," said Mr. Griffiths.

And Mrs. Fane replied, "Oh, yes, both his sons left a daughter; but I fancied one of them was yet quite a child."

"She leaves Notre Dame this year," replied the agent.

And then the conversation turned into other channels; and resisting all Mrs. Fane's entreaties that he would remain to dinner, Mr. Griffiths soon afterward took his departure.

CHAPTER II.

"Oh, pure and perfect pearl!"

THE sun was slowly sinking in the west behind the Catskills, and in the pure primrose of the November sky the first faint star of evening was glittering. All was so still, that the distant murmur of the Hudson, and the occasional

dropping of a nut from the yellowing trees, was the only sound which broke the profound stillness as Laurence Fane, his gun on his shoulder, and his tried dogs following close at his heels, walked slowly homeward through the woodland path, after a long day's shooting.

Descending the forest glade, ankle-deep in fallen leaves, which still kept falling, falling, red and sere across the young man's path, he unlatched a little wooden gate and took his way down a narrow lane, across which a quaint stone bridge spanned a little stream, which rushed down from the mountains to join the Hudson.

Against the bridge was leaning a woman's graceful form, and Laurence Fane's heart beat quicker than usual as he caught sight of the dainty figure clad in an ulster, and perceived that it was Marguerite Vaughan.

Eagerly he advanced and spoke her name; and as she turned hastily round on hearing herself addressed, Laurence caught her hand in his, and pressing it with a warmth he was at no pains to hide, exclaimed, "This is, indeed, a most unexpected meeting, Miss Vaughan; I had not the faintest idea that you were in Weston."

"We only arrived yesterday, Colonel Fane," she replied. "But I have been down to the village on a foraging expedition, and am just returning to the cottage."

"You did not seem in a great hurry," said Fane, still retaining in his the soft white hand, and looking down with undisguised admiration upon the bewitching face before him.

Marguerite Vaughan had been a noted beauty for two seasons in gay New York; and yet, after all, what was the beauty for which she had been admired? A small oval face; witching gray eyes; a "tip-tilted" nose; a wide mouth, disclosing teeth like pearls; a complexion pure and pale, with masses of dark chestnut hair; but the winning smile, the bright intelligence, aided by perfect taste in dress, had done the rest, added to which Marguerite Vaughan was, perhaps, one of the cleverest women in her set.

"I suppose I must not ask you how you like the cottage, Miss Vaughan?" said Laurence, following the direction of her eyes, which were resting upon a pretty, old-fashioned house, covered with masses of Virginian creeper and Gloire de Dijon roses, and whose mossy lawn came down to the edge of the rushing waters.

"I have not had time to make up my mind," rejoined the young woman. "I dare say it is delicious in summer; just now, perhaps, it is rather *triste*."

"Oh, you will not find it dull," replied her companion; "the neighborhood is a good one—there is plenty of society; and then you will ride, of course?"

"I don't think so," said Marguerite, rather sadly. "While I was in the city, with my uncle, I rode his horses, but now it is out of the question."

"Oh, Miss Vaughan, what a shame! and you ride so beautifully! I should be too proud,"—eagerly—"if you would allow me to provide you with a 'mount.'"

"You are very kind, Colonel Fane," the girl replied; "but neither my grandfather nor my cousin ride, so I think I shall have to content myself with walking." Then seeing his disappointed look, she turned the conversation by asking, "Who lives in that beautiful place?" pointing as she spoke, to a huge pile of brown stone, which, surrounded with magnificent woods, clothed in all the exquisite mellowing tints of autumn, stood in full view from where they were.

"That is Trevor Hall, Miss Vaughan," replied Laurence. "It is the residence of your landlord, Mr. Trevor."

"Is he there now?" asked Marguerite.

And Fane replied, "Oh, no; he is in Africa, I believe. It is six or seven years since he was at home for more than a day or two at a time."

They had walked slowly along side by side during this brief conversation, and they had

now reached the road which led to the cottage where Marguerite resided.

Marguerite paused, and held out her hand.

"Good-by, Colonel Fane," she said. "I must not let you come any further to-day. I shall be wanted at home, where everything at present is 'confusion worse confounded,' or I would ask you to come in and be introduced to my grandfather."

"But I may come soon, may I not, Pearl?" he said, his voice uttering the name by which he always thought of her, and which suited her so well, in tender, lingering tones. And a soft flush rose to her pale cheeks, and the wonderful eyes sunk beneath his unmistakable look of admiration, as she gently disengaged her hand from the fond clasp in which he held it, and turned and left him standing there in the dying light of the still, autumnal day, watching her slight, graceful form as she walked along the path, till the trees intervened and hid her from his view; then he turned and whistling to his dogs, slowly retraced his steps toward his home, his heart throbbing tumultuously, as he told himself that the woman whom he loved so well was at last so near to him.

"What, all in the dark, Daisy?" exclaimed Marguerite Vaughan, as, crossing the quaint, shadowy hall, looking strange and unhome-like in the gathering twilight of the November evening, she pushed open the door of a small room, with glass doors opening upon the flagged terrace overlooking the river, which had been hastily rendered habitable on their arrival at their new home.

A pale, crescent moon, struggling with the dying daylight, was shining into the room, and throwing fantastic shadows upon the polished oak floor; a wood fire was expiring on the hearth, and the figure of a woman was barely distinguishable amid the surrounding gloom.

A strange weird feeling oppressed Marguerite as she watched the shadows gathering round her cousin's bright head. She hastily flung several pieces of fresh wood upon the fire, and, ringing the bell, ordered the servant who answered it to bring in the lamp.

"Has Miss Daisy had tea?" she asked; and the girl replied in the negative. "Bring it in, then," said her mistress; and, turning to her cousin, whose white lids were closed over the lovely eyes, she exclaimed, "Come, lazy one, wake up and have some tea; do you know how late it is getting?"

Daisy opened her eyes, and looked bewilderedly at her cousin.

"How you startled me, Pearl!" she cried, with a gay laugh. "I was dreaming of the convent; and I thought it was Sister Angela calling me to matins. But where have you been?—and what makes you so late? How cold the room is!"—rising from her chair with a shiver—a tall, stately form, nearly a head taller than her cousin, her beautiful figure set off by the clinging folds of her dress of black serge, against which the exquisite creamy throat shone fair as any lily.

At this moment, the neat waitress entered with the tea upon a dainty salver; and throwing off her ulster, Marguerite proceeded to pour out the tea, asking, as she did so, "Has my grandfather gone out, Mary?"

"No, miss," replied the servant. "Master is resting in his room till dinner-time; he is very tired this afternoon."

"Indeed, Pearl," said her cousin, as she sipped her tea, and demolished slice after slice of richly-buttered cake, "grandpapa may well be tired; he has been getting in everybody's way all the afternoon, and insisting on knocking nails in everywhere. 'Price, Carpenter,' as they call him, has been at his wit's end. But tell me, have you seen any one in this dull place?"

"I don't think we shall find it dull, dear," rejoined her cousin. "I met Colonel Fane; that fine, dashing fellow, of whom you have heard me speak so often."

"Often!" replied Daisy, dryly.

And the other blushed, and went on, "He

says this is a very good neighborhood, with plenty of balls in the winter, and all sorts of picnic, lawn-tennis, and garden parties."

"Oh, that is quite too delightful, Pearl!" said her cousin; "but we don't know any one, so how can we join in these gayeties?"

"Mrs. Fane will call next week, Daisy, and she will introduce us to the neighborhood."

"Oh, how delicious, Pearl! And what sort of a man is your colonel? Shall I like him, do you think?"

"I hope so," said her cousin, softly, her voice taking a tenderer tone as she spoke.

And so the girls chatted on, unconscious that a crisis in their lives had arrived, and that a strange and terrible doom was hovering over one of those bright heads, while a sorrow, deep and lasting, was to be the portion of the other.

CHAPTER III.

"As moonlight unto sunlight, or as water unto wine."

SHAKEN by the soft south wind, they kept falling softly, softly, those perfumed apple blossoms, upon the white hands and graceful bowed head of Marguerite Vaughan, as, seemingly intent upon her crewel work, she sat under a tree in the old orchard.

The noise of flowing water, mingled with the song of birds and the scent of flowers, filled the soft, balmy air. This was a favorite resort of Marguerite's; here she would bring her book or work, or, seated in her garden chair, with hands idly folded in her lap, dream the sweet spring hours away.

The months that have elapsed since she came to her country home have somewhat changed Marguerite, over whose beautiful, high bred face a strange shadow seems to have fallen.

Yet the keenest observer would be puzzled to say in what that shadow consists.

The complexion is as pure and delicate as of old; the dainty dress of white cambric, with its costly lace trimmings, as carefully adjusted as ever.

A calm smile lingers on the parted lips, while gay laugh and witty jest are heard as often as formerly; but let Marguerite Vaughan only lift those wonderful eyes—that seem now so intent upon the difficult shading of a cowslip—and the change will be seen in a moment.

Those lovely pathetic eyes hiding so bravely a heart's sorrow, have watched calmly, bravely, as befits the women of a proud race, the loss of all that had made life fair and sweet to her; had looked on with smiles that hid a breaking heart, while the man whom she loved with all the force of a strong true nature had fallen a helpless slave before the bright seductive glances shot from the eyes of Daisy Vaughan.

It had been the same old tale over again—"the woman tempted me;" for no sooner did Daisy perceive that Colonel Fane's entire thoughts were fixed upon her cousin, than her insatiable vanity was aroused, and she spared no pains to win the heart of the man whom Marguerite loved.

And she succeeded but too easily!

Perhaps no man could have resisted the glamour of Daisy's splendid beauty, enhanced by all the seductive wiles which she brought to bear upon her victim. At any rate, Colonel Fane could not; he was but another Samson, helplessly bound at the feet of Delilah.

And Marguerite had to stand calmly by, and see the man whom she loved so passionately pour all the treasure of his honest heart upon her cold, worldly cousin, whom her own true womanly instinct told her was unworthy of the love of a man like Laurence Fane.

While Marguerite sat calmly bending over her embroidery, Daisy was reclining in luxurious ease in a hammock suspended from the branches of a neighboring tree, leisurely fanning herself with a big fan of peacock feathers, and it was thus she was first seen by a man who, accompanied by Colonel Fane, at that moment entered the orchard.

Thus St. John Trevor first saw her; and the memory of her as he saw her then in all the

splendor of her perfect beauty, with the sunbeams filtering through the fair spring leaves above her, turning to burnished gold the coils of chestnut tresses wound round her shapely head, and lighting up the pure rose-leaf bloom of her skin, while her marvelous eyes, deep, passionate, and beguiling, were half hidden by their long-fringed lashes, was fated to haunt him in many a lonely hour—hours full of sadness and despair—long after that bright head was laid low, and the gay voice hushed forever.

After the usual greetings between Laurence Fane and the girls were over, he turned to his companion, standing a little apart, and said, "I have brought you my friend Mr. Trevor, Miss Vaughan, and I hope you will kindly make him welcome. He is indeed a stranger here."

Marguerite extended her hand to the newcomer with a few courteous words of greeting.

She saw before her a tall, stately man, bearing the unmistakable stamp of good birth and high breeding upon every pose of his erect figure, and in every feature of his haughty, darkly-handsome face.

He was about forty years of age, with complexion deeply bronzed by foreign suns; deep-set, dark eyes; close-cropped black hair; and heavy mustache shading a handsome mouth, which bore a tired, cynical expression, while the beautiful eyes told a tale of listless weariness, as if he had discovered the truth of the preacher's words, "All is vanity."

Such was St. John Trevor, the owner of all the wide-spreading acres that stretched away on every side; and it was with a feeling of more than common interest that Daisy regarded him when, assisted by Colonel Fane's ready hand, she descended from her hammock and joined the party.

The tea being at this moment carried into the orchard, and placed upon the rustic table by Marguerite's elbow, she proceeded to pour it out, and, nothing loth, her visitors consented to remain and partake of it with her.

Laurence, with his cup in his hand, was in close attendance, as usual, upon Daisy, whose attention, however, wandered a good deal, and whose eyes were oftener fixed upon St. John Trevor than Laurence at all approved of. Indeed, as he noted Mr. Trevor's undisguised look of admiration he made up his mind to bring matters to a crisis, and to put his fortune to the test—let him win or lose it all.

Taking no notice of Colonel Fane's extended hand, Daisy herself carried her cup to Marguerite to be refilled; and regardless of her lover's longing looks, she remained by her cousin; while Trevor seized the opportunity and entered into conversation with her.

When the low tones of St. John's voice fell upon Daisy's ear, as he made some trifling remark to her, the young girl started and shivered slightly.

"Cold, Daisy dear?" asked Marguerite, kindly.

And her cousin answered, laughing and looking from under her lowered eyelids at St. John, "No, Pearl; but I believe some one is treading upon my grave!"

"What nonsense, dear! How can you be so childish?" said Marguerite, with a faint laugh.

"Well, at any rate," replied the young girl, "I felt a strange, ghostly feeling just then." And turning the splendor of her eyes upon Trevor she said, "Are you glad to be at home, after all your wanderings, Mr. Trevor?—and do you mean to be very gay this summer?"

Laurence looked hastily at St. John, and colored with vexation through his bronzed skin as Daisy put this question to his friend, for he knew full well how little of pleasure was associated with St. John Trevor's splendid home, and how cruel were the memories connected with it. Very grim, indeed, was the skeleton hidden in those stately walls! But he might have spared himself any anxiety.

Trevor's voice was as calm as ever in its high-bred tones as he replied to Daisy's question, "Well, Miss Vaughan, I am, perhaps, rather

old for any schoolboy raptures on revisiting Trevor Hall; and the absence of a hostess must prevent my entertaining any friends under my own roof. Still, I shall gladly accept any proffered hospitalities during my stay here, which, however, will not be a very long one, I dare say. I am rather like the Wandering Jew, and cannot content myself for more than a few weeks at any place."

The party was at this moment joined by Admiral Vaughan; and Pearl rose from her seat and tenderly adjusted the pillows of the low wicker chair beside her for her grandfather.

Very frail, indeed, the old man looked in the sweet spring sunshine, and very feeble and trembling were the wan hands which had fought bravely for his country.

It was evident to the most casual observer that the old man's hold on life was at best a very slender one; and, looking at him, Laurence's heart ached for the beautiful girls, whom their grandfather's death would leave friendless and well-nigh penniless. And in his generous heart he vowed that if his beautiful Daisy would accept his hand, he would guard both the fair Marguerites from every trouble. But

"The best-laid schemes of mice and men
Gang aft agley."

And Laurence was fated before very long to discover this for himself.

St. John Trevor was tired of the old admiral's childish talk; and seeing that there was little chance of engaging Daisy in conversation in the presence of her grandfather, he soon after took his leave.

A burning July day was drawing to a close, and a light breeze from the river, which murmured idly over its pebbly bed, was fanning Daisy Vaughan's blooming cheeks and ruffling the light tendrils of her hair. Her lovely, mutinous mouth is curved with smiles, and in the splendid eyes is a gleam of passion—rarely seen there—which causes the pulses of the strong man beside her to quicken, and his heart to throb wildly as he looks at her.

How lovely, how bewitching is this convent-bred girl! And for the hundredth time her companion wonders where in all the wide world she could have learnt her beguiling ways, how she ever became possessed of such charm of voice and manner.

And St. John Trevor, you do not know that through her veins flows the blood of generations of coquettes; and she needs no intercourse with your world to teach her how to use her marvelous powers of fascination.

Her voice is low as she replies to Mr. Trevor's speeches—low, strangely, perilously sweet,—"I do not wonder that you find this place dull, Mr. Trevor; you who are free to go where you like. Ah, how I weary of it all!"

"Because you are young, and fancy society is all it appears to be; but perhaps when you have tasted its *delights*"—with bitter irony in his tones—"you will be as tired of it as I am. You ought to be happy here. To me it seems nothing short of a Paradise; and you" sinking his voice to a lower, tenderer tone—"its lovely and beautiful Eve."

And truly the scene seemed like Paradise: the splendid woods of Trevor Hall, arrayed in all the glory of their summer foliage; the distant gleams of the river, far below their feet; the mossy turf enameled with flowers; while far off, the dim mountains reared their tall summits to the heavens; and over all was the sunset sky, its glories of gold and crimson fading into the pure tints of primrose and opal, as the sun sunk lower and lower behind the distant hills.

The scene, the hour, possessed a strange charm for Daisy; and her heart—which all Laurence Fane's fond, tender words were powerless to move—throbbed wildly at these few words uttered by St. John's thrilling voice.

They walked for some moments in silence—a silence in which Daisy could hear the quick throbs of the heart, which usually beat so

placidly, under the snowy folds of her muslin gown.

At last, Trevor turned and looked at Daisy. Very pale he looked through his bronzed skin as he said, "I have made a fatal discovery to-day, Miss Vaughan; yes, a very fatal discovery."

"A discovery, Mr. Trevor?" asked the girl, trembling, she hardly knew why, as she spoke. "What discovery?"

"That I love you!"

She looked at him for a moment, trembling excessively, and then burst into a passion of tears.

"My love, my darling!" he exclaimed, catching her passionately in his arms, and holding her closely there, while his deep eyes looked down into hers fondly, wistfully, but with none of the joy of a successful lover visible in their depths. "Don't cry, Daisy! I cannot bear that! I never meant to tell you, love, for I am the most wretched man in existence! I love you; I feel, too, that I have gained your love—villain that I am for doing so; but I cannot ask you to become my wife! Betwixt me and wedded happiness lies the gloomy shadow of a grave! A curse rests on all I love, darling, and I dare not attempt to cloud your sunny life with its baleful influence!"

Daisy gently disengaged herself from Trevor's arms, and looking up in his face, her magnificent eyes aglow with love, asked, in a low, beseeching voice, "But you love me?"

"Love you, darling?" replied Trevor, passionately. "Ay; how fondly you will never know! I loved you from the first moment I saw you under the apple-blossoms, with poor old Lance making love to you! What but you keeps me in this hateful place?"—a dark shadow shading his face as he spoke.

Daisy plainly perceived that St. John loved her. Her quick intuition told her that, whatever the obstacle was between them, it was not want of love that prevented him making her his wife; and she was content to wait a while, trusting that all would come right in time, and congratulating herself that the only man who had power to touch her cold, worldly heart was the owner of the broad lands and splendid domain of Trevor Hall.

But Trevor—easily deceived, as are, indeed, most men where women are concerned—had no idea that his worldly circumstances had any weight with the lovely girl beside him, or guessed that the love he felt for her—world-worn, reckless man though he was—was far more passionate and enduring than her own.

And as they walked beneath the darkening sky, while the stars came out one by one in the purple heavens, and the song of the birds was hushed, no sound was audible in the profound stillness but the soothing, far-off murmur of the river and their own wildly beating hearts.

Daisy was the first to rouse herself from their dreams of an impossible future, and to suggest the idea of returning to the cottage.

"Marguerite will wonder what has become of me," she added, softly, "and I would not for worlds have her find out where I have been!"

"No, indeed, my darling," rejoined Trevor, hastily; "that would never do! But you will not wholly forget me?—you will meet me here again?" he asked, eagerly.

And Daisy, blushing between smiles and tears, gave the required promise, wondering vaguely, as she took her way through the forest pathway, what was the nature of the obstacle to which St. John had so strangely alluded.

The same setting sun whose beams had gilded tree and mountain, and been the silent witness of Daisy and St. John's stolen meeting, was shining into a wide range of windows at Trevor Hall, and flooding with its beams the beautiful garden upon which those windows opened.

It was the only suite of apartments in use in that splendid mansion.

Everywhere else the gilded and satin furniture, the exquisite pictures and priceless gems of art, were hidden beneath holland coverings, and silence and desolation reigned supreme.

It is fifteen years since the walls of the old house echoed with song and laughter—fifteen years since its owner hurried away, with anguish in his heart, to seek in other lands that peace and happiness which were to be his portion, ah, nevermore!

In this handsome saloon, its long windows all aflame with the westering sun, a woman is restlessly pacing to and fro, ever and anon stopping in her aimless walk to gaze through the barred windows, upon the beautiful garden, and then, turning to her attendant—a respectable-looking woman of middle age, who sits knitting by one of the windows—she wails forth:

"He is not coming yet, Williams! How long will he keep me waiting?—oh, when will he come again?"

She is a woman still young, though the long hair which hangs over her muslin gown, from which her restless fingers have rent away the costly lace at throat and wrist, is white as snow; though the lovely features are pinched and wan, and the blue eyes, with such a weird, mournful expression in their depths, look out from such a wasted face, whose pallid smile is more pitiful far than tears.

Fifteen years ago, a strong, stalwart man was hanging, in anguish too deep for tears, over the dead body of a tiny babe, who lay in his lace-bedecked cot, killed in one mad moment by his mother; and in a darkened room, strapped down to her bed, the idolized young wife, the mother of the long-looked-for heir, whose birth had cost that mother her reason, lay raving, a hopeless maniac!

It was St. John Trevor's wife.

CHAPTER IV.

"Love for a week, a month, a day."

"It is a base calumny, Colonel Fane; I will not believe a word of it."

The speaker was Daisy Vaughan; the scene, the conservatory at Fairview, and Daisy was standing among the flowers, her graceful figure drawn up to its full height, with lightning flashing from her eyes, and her fingers busy tearing the petals from her bouquet which strewn the marble pavement at her feet with their fragrant blossoms.

The soft strains of the "Manola Waltz" were rising and falling on the air from the adjoining ball-room, where all the rank and wealth of the county were assembled. Daisy looked splendidly handsome, her ball dress setting off her peerless face and figure to advantage.

And so thought Laurence Fane as he stood before her, looking, with unutterable sadness in his honest, kindly eyes, upon the angry beauty.

"It is perfectly true, Miss Vaughan. Do you think for one moment"—a shade of hauteur in his manner as he spoke—"that I should tell you a lie?"

"If it be true," rejoined Daisy hotly, "you are betraying your friend's confidence. I had deemed Colonel Fane too honorable a man for that, but I suppose I have been mistaken in my estimate of his character."

This last remark was made with scornful bitterness, which goaded Laurence into saying, "It is no secret, Miss Vaughan; I am only surprised that you are ignorant of the sad story attached to Trevor Hall. Every one knows the truth."

"And that is—" asked Daisy, in sickening terror lest, after all, Colonel Fane's assertion that St. John Trevor was a married man might be true, and not a mere story invented by Laurence's jealous brain.

Laurence looked down upon the ground upon the fair, trampled flowers—dead, like his own hopes—as he replied, "Sixteen years ago, Trevor Hall was noted throughout the county for the splendor of the hospitalities dispensed

within its walls. St. John Trevor was just married, and his wife was a beautiful high-bred woman, the idol of her fond husband's heart. The birth of an heir was celebrated by all kinds of rejoicing—soon, alas! to be turned to bitter mourning. Mrs. Trevor—who had seemed rather strange after the birth of the young heir—chancing to be left alone for a few moments, strangled the poor child as it lay beside her, and was discovered, a few minutes afterward, by the horror-stricken nurse, endeavoring to fling herself from the lofty window of her room. As she was discovered then, so she has continued until this day—a hopeless, raving maniac, and has for years been secluded in the wing of the spacious mansion of which she was once the proud and beloved mistress."

Laurence concluded his sad tale with a pitying sigh; and without waiting to note its effect upon the young girl, quietly quitted the conservatory.

When he was gone, Daisy stood for a moment, cold, still, pale as death; then, with an exceeding bitter cry, she flung herself face downward upon a couch, while tears, which all her efforts were unavailing to repress, streamed from her eyes.

Poor Daisy! it was indeed a heavy blow to that stormy, ambitious heart, so passionate, so undisciplined.

When her first frantic burst of grief had spent itself, and only the deep-drawn sobs betrayed the tempest that had passed over her soul, she raised her head from the pillows of the couch, and perceiving that the glass doors leading into the garden were open, rose from her seat, and passed out into the cool, perfumed air of the autumnal night.

Descending the flight of moss-grown stone steps leading to the lawn, she entered the beech-tree avenue, and slowly paced along under the fragrant boughs which arched over her head.

Rage and anguish possessed her proud soul, and her heart was a prey to the bitterest grief, for, as much as it was possible for her to love any one, she loved St. John Trevor.

A pale crescent moon was shining through the trees, and lighting up her pale face and dark, anguished eyes. As she moved along, she looked like a spirit in her trailing white robes; and so thought a gentleman who just then entered the avenue, and advanced toward her.

"Did you think you could hide yourself from me, Daisy?" said the new-comer. And there was a subtle caress in his tones which made the girl's heart throb quickly. "I have been looking for you for the last hour. Where have you been, darling?" tenderly taking her hand as he spoke.

Daisy snatched it from his impassioned clasp, exclaiming, as she did so:

"I am at a loss to know, Mr. Trevor, by what right you watch my movements." Then, "Oh, St. John!" she cried, bursting into tears, "how could you deceive me so cruelly?"

"Deceive you, Daisy!—how have I deceived you?" he asked, while a pale gray shade passed over his dark face.

"Do you think"—she paused, almost exhausted by her previous emotion—"do you for one moment imagine that I would have met you so often—have listened to your protestations of devotion—have confessed—ah, dear Heaven! what shall I do?—have told you that I loved you—if I had known that you had a wife living?"

"I have been a bitter villain, Daisy," rejoined St. John, slowly; "but I thought you knew what was the obstacle which stood between us."

"St. John," exclaimed the girl, passionately, "for what have you taken me? Do you think the women of my name are so base as that? Go, leave me; and I pray that I may see your face no more!"

"Daisy," cried St. John, snatching the form of the woman he so madly loved in his arms, and holding her for one brief moment against

his breaking heart, "do not drive me from you—do not doom me to suffer the anguish of seeing you no more! Think what a life mine has been! Ah, pity me, darling, for surely I have had my share of sorrow!"

"I pity myself," replied Daisy, as she disengaged herself from his arms. "For you, Mr. Trevor, I have but one feeling—that of contempt!"

All the fierce, undisciplined spirit of his proud race rose at this taunt from the lips of the woman who was so unspeakably dear to him, and, unable to control himself, he caught Daisy's hand in his, and exclaimed:

"You taunt me now, Daisy; you forget in one moment all the vows you have made to me; but I will not forget them, and some day I will remind you of them again, for I swear if you attempt to marry any man but myself I will prevent you, if I die for it, and at some day not far distant I will have you for my own till death shall part us."

And dropping her hand, he turned and disappeared through the thick grove of trees, leaving Daisy standing as if riveted to the ground to recover her composure as best she might amid the silent trees, under the quiet stars.

It was a mild day in late autumn. The golden corn had been reaped and stacked and the ruddy apples gathered, while the woods of Trevor Place were one blaze of crimson, gold, and orange tints!

The river, swollen by the autumn rains, was tumbling down over its craggy bed.

An old mill stood by the side of the river—dilapidated, picturesque place, long since given over to decay and inhabited only by rats.

A row of stepping-stones crossed the river to the opposite side, where the stately woods of Trevor Hall rose in all their pride.

Seated on the bank, with dark, weary eyes fixed upon the distant towers of Trevor Hall, was Daisy Vaughan. Her book lay unheeded upon her knee, and very bitter were the thoughts which filled her breast.

St. John Trevor had left his home immediately after the ball at Fairview, and no one knew in what direction he was wandering; indeed, the little world of which he was the center, was so used to his frequent absences that they troubled themselves little about his movements.

Daisy was feeling very unhappy this afternoon, recalling the golden hours of that vanished summer with an aching heart—poor little worldly heart, that longed so passionately for love, for wealth, for happiness, for all fair and pleasant things!

Her life since she had left the convent, where she had been reared and received a fine education, had been but a series of disappointments.

Her grandfather's health was failing, added to which he had lately busied himself in some foolish speculations, and had lost nearly everything, save his pension, that he possessed in the world.

The household had been reduced, Admiral Vaughan's faithful man-servant, with one woman servant and a little girl to assist her in her duties, alone remaining. Marguerite bravely did her best to prop up the falling house, while poor Daisy did little but ramble about out of doors and lament incessantly over the dullness of her life.

One faithful friend still remained to her, and that was Laurence Fane, whose love for the beautiful girl was as deep and passionate as ever.

She was musing over her future prospects now as she sat by the tumbling river, and suddenly lifting up her eyes saw Colonel Fane, who was crossing the stepping stones and coming toward her.

His eyes brightened as he caught sight of the graceful figure, clad in blue serge, with dainty feet in Oxford shoes just peeping from below her short skirt; and springing across the insecure stones, he was soon at her side.

A very bright smile welcomed him, and

Daisy suffered him to press the little hand fondly in his broad palm as she replied to his greeting.

Laurence sat down upon the mossy stone by her side, and endeavored to amuse and entertain her with the usual "society" talk, failing, however, ignominiously in the attempt after a few minutes.

Daisy shivered slightly, and rose from her seat.

"It is getting chilly, Colonel Fane; I fear we are going to have a storm," she said, "and I must be going home," offering her hand as she spoke.

Laurence rose from his lowly position, and retaining her hand in his, said, in low, tender tones, which touched even Daisy's worldly heart:

"I have come here on purpose to ask you a question, Daisy; and I would ask you, in all earnestness, to give me a favorable answer if you can."

Then his calm self-restraint broke down, and passionately clasping her to his breast, he told her how truly, how fondly he loved her.

And Daisy, leaving her hand in his firm clasp, while her head rested upon his shoulder and her heart beat close to his, promised to be his wife; while between them was the memory of a dark, passionate face—the face of the only man she would ever love!

But in Laurence Fane's noble, generous soul there was not the faintest shadow of deceit or misgiving to dim the rapture of that hour.

If he remembered Daisy's flirtation with St. John Trevor, no feeling of doubt arose in his mind regarding that bygone intimacy.

Daisy had only been flattered by the attention of the most fascinating man she had ever known.

It was all over now, and she had promised to be his darling, cherished wife.

That twilight walk through the glowing autumn woods was long remembered by Laurence, when all beauty and sweetness had vanished out of his life, as it seemed forever!

CHAPTER V.

"Love not—the one you love may die."

A BLEAK, cold wind was blowing through leafless trees, and a heavy mist rested upon hill and mountain, while the unceasing murmur of the river sounded weird and gloomy in the profound stillness.

Marguerite Vaughan rose from her seat by the window, and pushing aside her sewing-machine, turned to the cheerful hearth, where huge logs of pine-wood were crackling and blazing cheerfully.

Drawing a low chair to the fire, she sat down before it, giving herself up to the sad memories, to the harassing thoughts that filled her heart.

And indeed Marguerite had enough of care laid upon her slender shoulders just then.

Her grandfather's health had failed so rapidly, that she persuaded him to allow her to take him to New York to consult a physician, as the only medical man in their neighborhood evidently did not understand the old admiral's disease.

They were to start on the morrow; and at the last moment Daisy had refused to accompany them.

A strange feeling of evil hung over Marguerite's soul as she sat with her eyes fixed upon the glowing fire. She dreaded leaving her cousin, and yet was unable to advance any good reason why Daisy should accompany them.

Their housekeeper was a clever, superior woman, the widow of one of St. John Trevor's managers, in whose charge the young girl would be perfectly safe.

Daisy had promised Laurence Fane that she would become his wife early in the new year, and Pearl was already busy over the dainty

needlework required for the trousseau, which her cousin was far too idle to undertake for herself.

Rousing herself with an effort, she left the easy-chair by the glowing fire, and proceeded into the kitchen to prepare the "five o'clock" tea; for Pearl was by no means a fine lady, and could turn her white hands to almost anything.

As she stood by the china closet, placing the fragile porcelain cups and saucers upon the old-fashioned silver tray, filling the Queen Anne cream ewer with rich cream, and cutting the wafer-like slices of bread and butter which her grandfather fancied, the housekeeper entered the kitchen.

She was a tall, dark, handsome woman, neatly dressed in dark calico and large white linen apron.

About her there was an air of refinement not in keeping with her present position.

Her eyes were dark and grave, and there was a look of power and determination about the proud mouth and finely-molded chin.

A woman to be respected, perhaps feared, thought Marguerite, but who did not seem likely ever to be loved.

"Have you heard the news, ma'am?" she asked, as she proceeded to prepare a brace of partridges for the spit.

"No, Morgan. Is there any particular news?" asked her mistress.

"Colonel Fane rode down about an hour ago," replied the housekeeper. "Miss Daisy was in here warming herself, the drawing-room fire having gone out, she said—and he was all in a hurry. He had been telegraphed to start for the South at once. The mistress was worse, the message said. He seemed in a great way about it; he would not stop, as he wanted to catch the express train to New York."

"Where is Miss Daisy?" asked Marguerite, taking the tray in her hand, and preparing to leave the kitchen.

"I think she went to her own room, ma'am," answered the housekeeper.

"Did she seem much vexed, Morgan?" asked her mistress, anxiously.

"Well, no, ma'am; I didn't see that she did. She said to the colonel, 'You'll be back as soon as you can, I suppose?' and he said he would, and he promised to telegraph; and that was all, I think."

Marguerite left the kitchen, vexed and dismayed at this unexpected news.

Mrs. Fane had lately gone South, ostensibly for her health, but, as Marguerite believed, really to avoid the gloom of a northern November.

But perhaps, after all, she had misjudged the poor lady, and it might really have been her failing health that had taken her abroad.

She felt vexed to think how dull and comfortless Daisy would be during her absence, and again tried to persuade the young girl to accompany her, but to no purpose; therefore, it was with a sad and aching heart that she bade farewell to her cousin the next morning, and departed, with the admiral and his faithful man-servant, to New York.

A wretchedly wet December day was drawing to a close as the railway train bore Marguerite and her grandfather at express speed up through the pleasant valley of the Hudson.

The fair landscape was blotted and blurred with the rain and mist; and as Marguerite wrapped the fur rug closer round the old admiral, so as to protect him from the deadly damp air, she longed unspeakably to be at home again.

The trip to New York had been of little avail, save to satisfy the girl that nothing had been left untried to prolong her grandfather's life.

The flat had gone forth, and the physicians whom she had consulted had all agreed that it was impossible to do more than smooth the sufferer's passage during the short time that would elapse before he entered the dark valley.

He might last some months with care and

freedom from excitement, they told his grandchild, and it would be a satisfaction to her to know that the end would be painless.

Then a few bland murmured words of sympathy had been spoken, the fee pocketed, and Marguerite politely bowed out of the room, to carry her heavy sorrow elsewhere, while a fresh patient claimed the physician's attention.

She had received cheerful and affectionate letters from Daisy during the first fortnight of her absence, but during the last week no letters had reached her.

She tried to account for this by thinking that Laurence had returned, and consequently that her cousin had been too busy to write.

But now the little rustic station had been reached, and she was soon busied in assisting the man-servant to place her grandfather in the jingling old fly in waiting, and they were driving over the sodden, steep road which led to the cottage.

Their arrival had been notified to the housekeeper, and Marguerite expected to see Daisy flying across the lighted hall to greet them.

But the door was opened by the housekeeper, who looked unutterably sad and perplexed, and no Daisy appeared to greet the returning travelers.

The empty, desolate hall was chill and dark; its gloomy oak paneling and heavy rafters looking drearier than ever, lighted by the dim lamp in the housekeeper's hand.

A dreadful feeling of apprehension filled Marguerite's heart as she asked hurriedly, "Is all well, Morgan? Where is Miss Daisy?"

"In her room, ma'am," replied the housekeeper, a strange, inscrutable look flitting over her face as she spoke; and she made a sign to Marguerite as if to beseech her to ask no more, and then added, "Master will be tired, ma'am; I have made a fire in his bedroom. Hadn't we better get him up-stairs at once?"

And, her heart sinking every moment lower and lower, Marguerite agreed, and assisted the servants to place the old man comfortably in his bed; and then, leaving him in charge of Stephens, she followed the housekeeper from the room.

"Come in here a minute, ma'am," said Morgan respectfully, as she opened the door of Marguerite's bedroom, bright with fire and candle-light, which sparkled upon the china and silver of the dainty tea-service placed upon the Chippendale table, which, with Marguerite's favorite easy-chair drawn close beside it, stood by the hearth.

"Where is Miss Daisy?" asked the girl vehemently as Morgan silently assisted her to unbutton her sealskin coat and to untie the ribbons of her bonnet. "I insist upon knowing the meaning of your strange manner!"

And gently compelling her mistress to sit down in the easy-chair, Morgan told her all.

A white change crept over Marguerite's face, an awful look, as of one turned to stone, as she listened to the sad tale; then, "Dead!" she exclaimed fiercely, bursting into a passion of tears. "Daisy dead!—impossible! Oh, Morgan, tell me immediately, why wasn't I informed?"

"I wrote as soon as there was any danger, ma'am; but it was so awfully sudden."

"I never got your letter!" wailed the poor girl. "Oh, little Daisy, my poor cousin! Oh, what will Laurence say? Tell me," she said, turning to the housekeeper, "tell me quickly how it all happened."

"It was a week to-day, ma'am, that Miss Daisy seemed feverish and poorly; she complained of a sore throat, and I persuaded her to go to bed early. As she seemed no better the next day I sent for Doctor Evans; but he had sprained his foot very badly, and he sent his assistant, Mr. Collins."

"What! that horribly conceited young man?" cried Marguerite, indignantly.

"He is considered clever, ma'am," rejoined Morgan, dryly; "and Miss Daisy wouldn't have any one else sent for; indeed, she did not want to see a doctor at all."

Marguerite's tears flowed fast.

"Poor darling girl! Oh, Morgan, you ought to have sent for me!"

"Indeed, ma'am," replied the woman, sorrowfully, "I never dreamt of any danger till three days ago; it was on a Wednesday, and that night she was taken suddenly alarmingly ill, and before morning all was over."

A thundering rap at the hall door caused Marguerite to start from her chair with a faint shriek, and interrupted Morgan in her sad tale.

"Who can he be?" said Miss Vaughan, with lips that trembled so pitifully that she could hardly speak.

"I will go and see, ma'am," said the housekeeper. "I sent Winifred home, as she was so afraid of infection; and there is no one to do anything but myself."

So saying, she left the room, closely followed by her mistress, whose nerves were so unstrung that she could not remain alone.

The ponderous oak door was unbarred, and hung open to admit Colonel Fane, who strode into the hall, the rain dripping from his "wrenched ulster."

His face was white and set, and catching sight of Marguerite standing in the shadowy hall, an alarmed expression on his face, he exclaimed, as he caught her hand in his, "Pearl, for God's sake tell me, where is Daisy?—what is this I have heard in the village?"

"Oh, my poor Laurence!" cried the unhappy young woman, wrung to the heart by the sight of the suffering of the man she loved so unselfishly; "we have lost her, our dear Daisy—our poor child!"

Silence in the dim hall; only the sound of howling wind and fast falling rain, mingled with a man's deep, heart-wrung sobs. Vainly did Pearl strive to comfort the bereaved man; his grief would have its way, till by-and-by he rose from the chair where he had flung himself, and in tones he strove in vain to render steady, said, "Forgive me, Pearl; the shock has unmanned me. I forgot your trouble, poor child! I may see her, may I not, my dear lost one?"

Silently Marguerite signed to Morgan to precede them into the dead girl's chamber; and tenderly laying her hand upon Colonel Fane's arm, she led him up the broad oak staircase to her cousin's room.

Very desolate looked the dainty apartment; the bed made, and the furniture all placed stiffly against the wall. Upon some tressels placed beneath the lofty oriel window stood the coffin of polished oak, the brass plate bearing in red and black letters the brief record:—"Daisy Vaughan, obiit December 18, aged 20."

"I did not know she was already placed in her coffin," said the bereaved cousin, in an awe-struck voice; then, as Colonel Fane endeavored in vain to turn back the lid to look once more upon that beloved face, she exclaimed, "Oh, Morgan, surely the coffin is not closed already?"

"It had to be done, dear Miss Vaughan," said the housekeeper, gently; and the vaulted room rung forth an exceedingly bitter cry, "Oh, Daisy, Daisy!" as Marguerite flung herself upon the ground beside the coffin which held the remains of her much-loved cousin.

CHAPTER VI.

"Trust me, all in all."

We must now return for a brief space to the unhappy Daisy, and see how she had spent the earlier days during her cousin's absence in the metropolis. She was utterly unable to account for the strange forebodings which oppressed her, and which urged her against her better judgment, and in spite of Marguerite's persuasions, to remain at the cottage instead of accompanying her cousin and her grandfather to New York.

The first few days of the departure of the travelers were wet and gloomy, and Daisy dreamed away the long hours by the side of the glowing fire; but one morning she awoke

to find the rain all gone, and a cloudless, pale sky and bright sunshine where all had lately been so damp and winterly. Every tiny twig and blade of grass glittered with hoar frost; and no sooner was her breakfast dispatched than Daisy wrapped herself warmly in her fur coat, and set off for a long ramble.

Almost mechanically she took her way to the lonely woodland pathway where she had spent such happy hours with St. John Trevor in that vanished summer ere she had learnt the cruel secret of his life.

She was walking along, her hands in her muff, and her eyes bent upon the ground, when a well-known step upon the frozen pathway caused her heart to beat wildly and the hot blood to rush to her cheek, and raising her eyes, she saw St. John Trevor standing before her.

Instantly the color died out of her lovely flower-like face; an awful tremor seized her from head to foot; all life, and light, and beauty faded from the glorious eyes, and a great horror and despair passed over her like a shadow. Ah, then, how great was St. John Trevor's remorse for the deceit he had practiced toward her! His very life would have seemed too small a sacrifice if he could have recalled the past.

"Daisy!" he exclaimed, passionately, holding out his hands; but she paid no heed to his voice, only stood before him an image of stony despair.

Tenderly, very tenderly he put his arm round her, and drew her to the shelter of his broad breast.

She tore herself from his arms with wild passion.

"How dare you?" she panted; and then turning from him, she burst into such a hopeless agony of tears that he was smote to the heart, for he loved her, this wandering, world-weary man—ah, how fondly, how devotedly!

Pale and silent he stood watching her, his suffering far exceeding her own. He was prepared for indignant reproaches, but this heart-broken burst of tears utterly unnerved him, and in all his life he had never felt himself at such a disadvantage as he did now.

At length her terrible sobs died away, and lifting her tear-drenched eyes to St. John's face, she said, pitifully: "See how you have made me suffer!"

"You will never forgive me?" asked Trevor. "But, ah! if you do, I can never forgive myself. What can I do to prove my sorrow?"

"Go—leave me," muttered the poor girl, faintly, without lifting her eyes from the ground.

No, by Heaven, Daisy," he exclaimed, "I will not go till I have your forgiveness for the deceit which has caused you so much sorrow, poor child! And yet, I never meant it, Daisy; the glamour of your beauty made me lose my head; but oh! can you not pity me?"

"I might have pitied St. John Trevor," she replied in a low, bitter tone; "but for the man who could lie to and deceive a woman, I have only contempt and abhorrence!"

"Daisy," exclaimed St. John, very gently, looking earnestly at her, "unsay those bitter words; do not be so cruelly unforgiving; I never meant to make you suffer; I would have died to save you one pang!"

Very contemptuous was the young girl's smile as she asked, "What excuse can you make? I think the facts speak for themselves."

"You are very cruel, indeed, and most unforgiving, Daisy!" he exclaimed.

"Cruel!" she echoed, with a mirthless laugh. "I may well be cruel and unforgiving when I remember how cruelly and wickedly I have been duped!"

"You are indeed severe, Daisy!" he cried, trying to take her hand in his, but she quickly wrenched it from his clasp. "You cannot guess, good, pure woman as you are, what an awful temptation it was for me to win your love—to have one heart for my own that disdained the allurements of fortune. I meant you no wrong, dear—Heaven forbid! But you

know the earlier part of my wretched history—all the trouble that has imbittered my life and made me a wanderer and an outcast; and how often, amid the glitter of society and the flatteries of false men and false women, I have yearned for one pure heart to love me for myself alone. Well, it does not matter now; I ought to satisfy myself with some bought affection, since I have failed to gain the only woman I can ever care for!" he added passionately, a pallid, bitter smile curving his proud lips.

"Some women might be won by falsehood and deception, Mr. Trevor; not the women of my race!"—haughtily raising her head, and looking him in the face.

He shrunk from her words as from the lash of a whip or the hiss of a serpent, and said, brokenly, "Is that all you have to say to me, Daisy?"

"All!" she cried, pitifully. "Who cares what I have had to suffer? Who cares for the weight of anguish I have had to bear? Even Pearl—good, true Pearl—never notices my grief, and Lance thinks his affection can make me forget the agony of that discovery. Do you know"—turning to him fiercely—"the days and nights I have passed since Laurence's voice dashed down my air-built castles—since I knew you for what you are! Ah, it is you who are cruel!"

"Then, Daisy, you do love me in spite of everything?" he cried, joyfully.

"Yes," she said, with the calmness of despair. "I do love you, but I am trying to tear from my heart one so false and despicable. I will tear my love from my heart, and trample it under foot; but it shall not continue in the possession of one so false and cruel. But what am I talking about?" she said wildly. "My heart, my love, of right belongs to Laurence Fane, who will know how to guard it as a brave man should."

"Laurence Fane!" he cried in the most vehement tones. "What is he to you?"

"Only my promised husband!" replied Daisy quietly.

"Hear me then, Daisy; for I swear that Laurence Fane shall never touch your hand again—never hold to his the heart which I know belongs to me alone!"

And turning on his heel, he left her standing there, with the shadow of a great dread overpowering her, and the bitterness of death in her heart.

It was late that afternoon, and all the brightness of the morning had dissolved in a misty rain, when Daisy took her way back to the cottage.

How she had spent the long hours of that wretched afternoon she knew not. In aimless wandering to and fro, in grief too deep for tears—thus had Daisy passed the day which had dawned so brightly.

Wet, weary, and chilled to the bone, she had dragged her tired footsteps back to the cottage, to be petted and waited upon by the housekeeper, who brought her tea into her room, and, undressing the tired girl, wrapped her in a warm dressing-gown, and placing her upon the sofa, left her to seek the repose she so much needed.

And when the worn-out girl rested her tired head upon the soft pillows of her couch and closed the white lids over her aching eyes, the housekeeper stole softly from the room, muttering as she closed the door behind her, "It will not be such a difficult task, after all, if only that tiresome Colonel Fane would but keep away a little longer."

And a strange inscrutable smile fitted over her face as she spoke, and slowly and thoughtfully she took her way down-stairs.

But day after day passed away, and still Daisy kept her room, too worn-out and broken-spirited to care to return to her usual occupation.

She was really ill, and suffering with a heavy, feverish cold, caught on that day when she had wandered so long among the damp woods of Trevor Hall.

One morning the housekeeper found her worse than usual, and insisted on sending for the doctor.

Unwillingly enough, Daisy complied; but was greatly annoyed when, instead of their usual medical attendant, a young man was brought into her room whom the old doctor had just taken to assist him in his practice.

"Where is Doctor Evans?" she asked, pettishly, as Mr. Collins, who stood by her couch, took her white hand in his, and proceeded to feel her pulse.

"He met with an accident yesterday, Miss Vaughan, and is unable to leave his bed at present," replied Mr. Collins—a clever, unscrupulous-looking man, with keen dark eyes—looking gravely at the young lady as he spoke. "Your illness is only a feverish cold, I assure you. I am quite competent to prescribe for it."

Daisy blushed and murmured some apology, ashamed of her momentary petulance.

Midnight at the cottage; no sound to be heard but the melancholy sighing of the wind, and the eternal swish, swish of the river against the shore.

A pale crescent moon gleamed from among the torn black masses of clouds, and threw but a faint light upon the surrounding objects. A small gate at one end of the lawn led into the Trevor woods.

At this gate stood a close carriage and pair of powerful dark brown horses, while the coachman slumbered peacefully upon the box.

Within the cottage all was still.

The young servant, frightened at the report of the infectious nature of Daisy's illness, had that day sought her home in the village, and the housekeeper was the only attendant left.

Daisy lay in a heavy, unnatural slumber upon the lace-trimmed pillows of her bed; her bright hair hung round her shoulders, and her lovely face but little changed by illness; save for a brighter flush upon the soft rounded cheek, she looked as peaceful as a sleeping child.

The door opened softly and the housekeeper entered, and after gazing long and anxiously at the sleeping girl, she turned to the door and signed for some one to enter.

Ah! where was the faithful Pearl—where the brave Colonel Fane—while their darling lay helpless at the mercy of a bold, bad man?

Very silently, St. John Trevor, accompanied by Mr. Collins, the sick girl's medical attendant, entered the room together, and advancing softly to the bed, the former lifted Daisy in his strong arms, and wrapping her in a warm fur cloak, carried her down to the waiting carriage.

"The rest I leave to you," he said to the medical attendant, as he jumped in after her; and giving hurried directions to the coachman, the carriage rolled away, its wheels making hardly any sound upon the mossy turf.

Wrapped in fur rugs and warm shawls, and drugged by a powerful opiate, Daisy knew nothing of what had happened to her until the next day, at nightfall, when the carriage rolled into a wide, grass-grown courtyard.

The steps were let down, and once more taking her in his arms, St. John Trevor bore her into a lofty, oak-paneled hall, up a flight of stone stairs, and into a handsome apartment, across the three tall windows of which iron bars had been newly fixed.

Here a pleasant-looking woman was waiting to receive her, and as St. John placed her upon a couch, and passionately kissed the white brow, she came forward, saying, "I think you had better leave her to me, sir. I will call if I want any assistance."

"Be very gentle with her, I beseech of you, Mrs. Brian," said St. John Trevor. "Poor girl, she feels so angry with me that she cannot bear the sight of me at present."

"Women are often set against their best friends, sir," replied the woman. "You may safely leave her with me."

And Trevor left the room.

Four days after her abduction poor Daisy lay raving in all the agonies of brain fever. Whether it was caused by the powerful opiate, or the hurried journey in her weak state, or the horror she felt when, on awakening from her drugged slumbers, she found St. John Trevor standing by her side, who can tell? Enough to say that for days Trevor watched beside her in agonies of fear and remorse too deep for words. And when at length the crisis was over, and her despair at the sight of him threatened to retard her recovery, he left the house and returned to New York, leaving her to the charge of Mrs. Brian and her husband, who had for years been his trusted, faithful servant.

Daily letters kept him informed of her progress toward recovery, and just then, when he was ardently anticipating a meeting with her, a letter reached him informing him that the illness which had spared her life had injured her brain to so great an extent that recovery was almost impossible.

Accompanied by one of the most celebrated doctors of the day, he hurried to the lonely old manor house where he had left Daisy, only to have his worst fears confirmed.

Her horror at seeing St. John was so great that it was impossible to force his society upon her; and goaded by this new misery, in a state of despair and remorse too great for pen to describe, Trevor left the house and hurried back to the city, leaving his unhappy victim to the care of the Brians.

CHAPTER VII.

"A round of weary duties."

AMID falling snow and driving wind, Marguerite stood beside the open, yawning grave in the Weston churchyard, and watched, amid blinding tears, her cousin's coffin, covered with wreaths and crosses of delicate white exotics, lowered with the cold, damp clay, and deposited in its last resting-place.

When all was over, and the echo of the solemn words, "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust," had died away, Marguerite turned from that early grave to take up and bear the burden of her grief as best she might.

And very patiently did she bear with the childish old admiral's sorrow; very nobly did she strive to comfort the grief-stricken man, whom she loved so devotedly, and whose anguish almost broke her heart.

A pearl beyond price she was indeed to those bereaved men during those desolate winter days, while she so bravely hid her own sorrow, and seemed to live only to cheer and tend her dying grandfather, and to speak words of peace and hope to the well-nigh heart-broken Laurence Fane.

Admiral Vaughan was attended in his last hours by old Doctor Evans, his clever young assistant, Mr. Collins, having become disgusted with the gloom and solitude of a village winter, and had taken himself and his talents to a wider sphere of action.

And so the cold, empty, colorless days of winter went by in that awful monotony, which, in after years, it is so terrible to remember, and the chill days of early spring slowly lengthened, and bloom and leaf clothed tree and hedgerow, and it became evident to the watchers by the old admiral's bed that his days were numbered.

At last came a day—when the trees in the orchard were one mass of white, perfumed blossoms; when the song of countless birds made the deep woodland silence musical both by day and night—that the brave old sailor turned his dying eyes for the last time upon the cloudless glory of the sunset, and with his feeble hand clasped in the firm, loving grasp of Marguerite's, drifted out on to the billows of that unknown sea whose dark waters all must cross, and his grandchild was left friendless, desolate, and well-nigh penniless.

It was a day in early May, bright with spring's fairest, sweetest flowers; musical with

the clear notes of the bluebirds and thrushes; and, framed in the spring greenery, seen in the clear, cold light, very fair, indeed, the old house looked, as Marguerite gazed at it with tired eyes, which had looked so long on suffering and death, that any pleasant sight seemed like the pictures we see in dreams.

The borders of the old Dutch gardens were all ablaze with yellow and red tulips, when Colonel Fane, walking along its smooth, green turf, smoking his solitary cigar, and absorbed in the deepest meditation, caught sight of the dainty, black-robed, slender figure which was walking by his mother's side.

Hastily throwing away his cigar, he advanced and caught the girl by the hands, exclaiming as he did so:

"Why, Pearl, I am glad to see you! I did not know you intended coming to-day."

The dainty little lady by her side answered for her, saying:

"Yes, Lance; and what news do you think Marguerite has brought us?"

"I don't know, mother, I am sure," rejoined her son. "I hope it is good news," looking keenly as he spoke at the delicate, high-bred face, which paled to the lips under his scrutinizing gaze.

"Only that I am going to leave Trevor," said Marguerite, gently.

"Leave Trevor!" exclaimed Laurence.

"What on earth for?"

"Ah, you may well say that, Lance!" said his mother, plaintively. "I am sure it is quite too abominably cruel of Marguerite to leave just now, when she has a little leisure, and I had been longing for her to be our guest. You try and persuade her to give up her mad scheme, dear."

And so saying Mrs. Fane turned away languidly, trailing her flowing, lace-trimmed, cream-colored draperies over the sunny lawn.

Laurence turned to Marguerite a look of intense sympathy as his mother's slight, graceful figure disappeared in the shadow of the heavy oaken door.

"Marguerite," he asked, kindly, "what is the cause of your sudden determination to leave Trevor?"

"It is not sudden, Laurence," the girl quietly replied. "I have long known that I should be dependent upon my own exertions when"—she hesitated—"when I should have lost my poor grandfather. It is no new thing to me."

"But, Marguerite, could not you make up your mind to stay with my mother? She is so exceedingly anxious to have you—she loves you so much! Do not leave us, dear, if you please,"—taking her hand in his as he spoke.

"I cannot, Laurence—do not ask me!" urged the poor girl, who loved him so entirely, but who felt that she could not live under the shelter of his roof and be the recipient of his coldly kind attentions, while she was trying with all her strength to stifle the love she might never acknowledge.

Something in the pitiful, beseeching glance of her dark eyes touched an almost forgotten chord in Laurence's breast, and he became clearly conscious of a vague feeling of dissatisfaction with himself and the world in general.

He knew, though even to himself he refused to acknowledge it, that in the past days which seemed so far off he had tried to win Marguerite's heart, and looking into her eyes, sorrowful with the dumb pain of a lost dog, pitiful with the agony of a broken heart, he feared that perhaps he had succeeded all too well.

Laurence Fane was one of the least vain of men, and he put the thought from him indignantly.

"What an ass I must be," he told himself, "to think such a woman as Pearl would waste one thought on a fellow like myself. She might have loved me once, perhaps, had I never wooed my poor lost Daisy; but now she is aware of all that has been done and happened, the thing is impossible!"

"Dear Marguerite," he said, kindly, "surely you might stay with us for a time, till the

newness of your grief has worn off? I cannot bear to think of you lonely and working for your bread in the midst of strangers."

"I could not stay at Fairview, Laurence," rejoined Marguerite; "but I have thought of boarding in Weston with old Mrs. Griffiths for a while. I have five thousand dollars, and the interest of that would suffice for my simple wants, and by-and-by, perhaps, I shall feel better able to face the world, and fight my way in it. I am very fond of Trevor," with a stifled sigh, "and should be grieved to leave it forever."

And so it was at length settled. The proud beauty, the belle of two seasons, took up her abode in the two tiny lavender-scented rooms of Mrs. Griffiths' pretty cottage, to live the life from which all sweetness and joy seemed forever banished, but withal manifesting all that the proud courage and patient endurance of her high-bred race.

CHAPTER VIII.

"The perfect trust—the rapture newly-born."

SUMMER was flinging her rich profusion of bloom and leaf over the fair land, and ripening the golden corn upon the mountain side.

Weston and its neighborhood were full of boarders; there was scarcely a lodging to be had for love or money.

The lovely sparkling waters of the Hudson were alive with rowboats, plainly visible to Marguerite Vaughan from the window of her tiny sitting-room, for Marguerite has been unable to tear herself from Weston.

She told herself over and over again that she could not bear to leave the graves in the silent, shadowy churchyard; but the fact of the matter was she had not the courage to sever the last link which bound her to that happy past, when she had believed herself to be beloved by Laurence Fane.

A long, burning July day was slowly drawing to its close, and, tired with the heat, Marguerite left her dusky, rose-decked sitting-room, and strolled down the moss-grown flight of stone steps which led to the river.

Seating herself under the shadow of a mountain ash, she gazed listlessly over the waters below her feet. The river was almost deserted now.

The hour, the scene, exercised a potent spell upon Marguerite's soul, and the moments slipped away unheeded, while the sun sunk lower in the west, a faint breeze ruffling the river, and the evening star gleaming in the faint primrose-tinted sky.

Marguerite was little altered.

The repose of the two years that had passed since her cousin's loss had obliterated the traces of that bygone agony; and if something of her girlish bloom had faded, the face that was lifted up to the great heavens was full of a noble patience, a dignified calm, far exceeding mere beauty either of form or complexion.

A step, that ever fell like music on her ears, sounded behind her, and, turning her head, she saw Laurence Fane advancing toward her.

As she rose from her low seat to greet him, what was there in his face that made her heart stand still, and then beat so wildly as almost to suffocate her?

A look was in those hazel eyes that she never thought to see there again—a look of love, of passionate devotion; and her eyes sunk below those burning glances, and the hand she had placed in his trembled in his strong clasp.

Without a word Laurence took her into his strong arms, and holding her there as if that fond clasp was never to be sundered, asked her, in low, broken tones, if she was content to have it so; if she could accept him for her husband—could trust him, whose heart had once wandered from her?

And she, forgetting all the past, forgiving all his desertion, for her sole answer holds out her tender arms, and draws his head fondly down to her faithful breast; and then there is no further need of words between them—only silence, tears—for what human words can ever

express either the extreme of bliss or the depths of woe.

"Why, Griffiths, my good fellow! what on earth's the matter?" exclaimed Colonel Fane, as his old friend entered the room, his honest, ruddy face looking strangely white and haggard, and an anxious, frightened expression being in his blue eyes, which Laurence had never before seen there. "You don't look any the better for your visit to New York. Been dissipating, I'm afraid!"—with a hearty laugh.

"No, colonel," replied the agent, slowly placing his hat on the table, and avoiding his friend's keen glance as he did so; "I've been quiet enough in New York, but I'll not deny that I'm greatly troubled; and on your account, too, I'm sorry to say," laying his strong hand upon Laurence's shoulder, and speaking gravely, sadly.

"On my account, Griffiths?" exclaimed Fane, staring at the agent in surprise. "I don't understand you."

"I'm afraid I've discovered that you have been made the victim of a piece of as abominable villainy as it's ever been my fate to meet with," rejoined Griffiths.

"My good friend," cried Laurence, "what are you talking about? Villainy and victims! why, you must have been attending the theaters till their stage plots have affected your brain! Come, old fellow, have a brandy and soda, and be a little more like yourself!"—placing, as he spoke, his hand upon the bell.

"No brandy and soda for me, thanks, colonel," said Griffiths, gravely. "I want your advice about a queer discovery I'm afraid I've made; and I can't settle to anything till I've told you all about it."

Seeing his old friend was really in earnest, Laurence exclaimed, "Out with it, old man! Keep nothing back! Let's hear your newest and latest adventures!"

And the agent, studiously avoiding to meet Colonel Fane's eye, said, "I had some business at the New York Bank the other day, Fane, and, that completed, I stood a minute or two upon the pavement, waiting till the driver of the stage I had signaled could draw up. By the side of me was an old apple woman with her stall, and beside her stood a girl selling button-hole bouquets. She was the loveliest creature I ever saw in my life; and I was intently watching her, when she turned round, and fixing a pair of the most eloquent eyes in the world upon my face, asked me, in low, plaintive tones, to buy a flower. Fane," continued the agent, turning round and looking at the young man, who was listlessly smoking his cigar, an amused smile upon his face at the other's praises of this unknown beauty, "as sure as you and I stand here face to face, that flower-girl was no other than Daisy Vaughan!"

A sound as of rushing waters in his ears, a heaving of the floor upon which he stood, the horror of a great darkness, and Laurence Fane knew no more, until by-and-by he opened his eyes and found himself seated in an arm chair by the open window, his cravat loosened, and the agent standing leaning over him, with a look of grief upon his face.

"Here, drink this, colonel," he said, handing Laurence a glass of brandy and water as he spoke.

The young man obeyed, and set the empty glass down upon the table by his side with a heavy sigh.

"What has been the matter, Griffiths?" he said, vaguely, pushing his hair off his forehead as he spoke.

"You fainted, Vane," replied his old friend; "but you are all right now."

"Ah! I remember," cried the other, starting from his seat as he spoke; "it was something about—"

"Daisy Vaughan," said Griffiths; adding, as he laid his hand kindly upon Colonel Fane's arm, "bear it like a man, Fane; I am sure there is some dark mystery connected with that poor girl. You know I am a plain matter-of-fact fellow, the last person likely to be

taken in by a chance likeness, and I feel certain that it was Daisy Vaughan who offered me the rose in New York a week ago—face, voice, manner, all were hers."

"But, Griffiths," said the colonel, bewilderedly, "surely you must see that that is impossible? Why, man, I was present at her funeral—a cold, bleak day it was—and I saw her coffin laid in the grave in the Weston churchyard myself!"

"Did you see what the coffin contained?" asked Griffiths, dryly. "No!"—as Fane made a gesture of dissent—"I thought not. Then, as sure as I live, colonel, Daisy Vaughan was never buried in Weston churchyard!"

"Griffiths, this is too preposterous!" exclaimed the young man, angrily. "Bring your common sense to bear upon the subject. What you say is not possible! Besides, who could have imagined and carried out so infamous a deceit? Who could have had any motive for so foul a wrong?"

"I know nothing about the motive, Fane," replied the agent, doggedly, taking his hat and gloves from the table as he spoke; "that's your affair, and it seems to me to be your plain duty to sift the matter to the bottom. I dare say you think me an officious old fellow for meddling in the matter at all, but I thought that something ought to be done. It is too horrible to think of that beautiful girl in such a position. However, I'll say no more on the subject. Good morning." And, with a curt nod, Mr. Griffiths was leaving the room.

But Laurence exclaimed, "Nay, old friend, don't let us part like that. Come back, and let us talk the matter over quietly; though, upon my word"—with an impatient sigh—"I don't see what we can do."

"Do!" replied Griffiths, warmly. "Why, ferret out the doctor, who attended Miss Vaughan, and that precious housekeeper who lived at the cottage at the time of the young lady's death—if she did die—the last to himself—and subject them to a stiff cross-examination."

"Mr. Collins, the doctor who attended Daisy, was Doctor Evans's assistant, and went to Canada immediately after her death," said Fane, wearily; "but I have not the slightest idea what became of the housekeeper."

"Ah, bribed, of course, both of them," rejoined the agent, dryly. "I never could endure the look of that cunning old housekeeper, though Mr. Trevor recommended her so highly, and thought so much of her family."

"But what could be the motive?" again impatiently urged the badgered colonel.

"Humph!—jealousy!" briefly replied the other; and then he added, "Now, look here, Fane, I'm not going to embark in this affair; it's no business of mine, though I'll own I have my suspicions; still, circumstances prevent my being as open as I should like to be with you. I can only give you a hint. Were you ever jealous of any man paying attention to Miss Vaughan? I can see you were!"—as he marked Laurence's start of surprise at the question. "You need tell me no more."

"Yes; that's all very well, Griffiths; but I do not see what I can do."

"You can examine the grave!" replied the other man, impressively.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SEARCH.

It was a dark and dreary night, a hollow wind was blowing through the trees, and a small, fine rain was silently descending upon the parched earth, when Colonel Fane, armed with the necessary authority, and accompanied by Mr. Griffiths, and a private detective, stood by the side of Daisy Vaughan's grave in the Weston churchyard.

The fair, white marble cross, which marked her last resting-place, had been removed by the men whom the agent had engaged for that purpose.

White as death, and hardly able to stand, Laurence leant upon Mr. Griffiths' arm, watching, with haggard eyes, the mournful proceedings.

Who can describe the grief that swept over the strong man's soul as he stood by the grave of his dead love?

The driving wind, the beating rain, the mournful abode of the dead, vanished; and, in its place, he saw Daisy, as he had so often seen her in the unforgotten past, standing beside him in her white gown, the sunshine flickering through emerald leaves upon her exquisite face and gleaming hair; with the beautiful river tumbling over its craggy bed below her feet; with the blue sky above her, a welcoming smile upon the parted lips—and now?

He almost felt ashamed of the part he was playing; and yet it was clearly his duty to pursue this investigation to the bitter end.

When, at last, the coffin, of polished oak, was lifted out of the grave, and the light of the lanterns flashed upon the brass plate bearing in mediæval letters of red and black that once-loved name, "Marguerite Vaughan, obiit December 18th, aged 20," Laurence would have fallen to the ground had it not been for the strong arm of his faithful friend, upon which he leaned; and Mr. Griffiths insisted upon his taking some brandy from his pocket-flask before anything further was done.

Amid hushed silence from the spectators—while the unfortunate Laurence, in anguish far too deep for tears, stood by, his face hidden in his hands—the coffin was opened!

A loud exclamation from the men, and a smothered oath from Mr. Griffiths' white lips, caused Colonel Fane to uncover his face, and to look about him.

What a sight met his horrified gaze!

No once-loved form filled that coffin! No fair golden head had ever rested on that satin pillow!

The coffin was empty!

A row of bricks, covered with wadding, and hidden from view by a coverlid of white satin, was all it contained.

"It is just what I expected, Colonel Fane," said Griffiths, when Laurence had partly recovered from the shock which he had received. "Miss Vaughan is no more dead than you are, and this empty coffin was buried here in order to deceive her friends, and to prevent any search being made for her. It was Daisy Vaughan, you may depend upon it—I'll swear to it, if necessary,—whom I saw selling flowers in New York, near the Bank; and it is for you to find out the cause of this black piece of villainy."

"You will see that everything needful is done, and make your men keep quiet on the subject for the present," said Laurence to the detective, who stood firm and erect by the side of that desecrated grave, as if such proceedings as the present were an every-day occurrence not worth feeling surprised about. "Have all that hideous mockery removed," pointing to the marble cross, with its exquisitely-sculptured lilies, and the empty coffin, "and after that come to me, and I will pay all expenses." And then turning to Griffiths, "For Heaven's sake let us get away from here as quickly as possible;" and, followed by his friend, he hurriedly left the church-yard.

Evening shadows were falling fast, and amid the stately trees of Fairview, Laurence and Marguerite paced slowly side by side. The road led through a beech plantation, above which a young crescent moon was dimly shining.

The lovers were very silent.

Colonel Fane had just concluded his recital of the strange events of the preceding night; and, as may easily be imagined, Marguerite had heard the tale with horror and indignation.

Her noble soul and pure mind could hardly realize the base plot of which they had been made the victims.

At last she said, slowly, "This parts us, then, Lance!" her voice trembling a little as she pronounced the beloved name.

"Parts us, Pearl?" echoed Laurence, incredulously. "What on earth do you mean,

my darling? What power on earth can part us now?"

"Your engagement to my poor cousin still continues, Laurence," rejoined Marguerite, firmly. "She has done nothing to forfeit your love; it is plainly your duty to seek her, and restore her to us all."

"What nonsense you are talking, Pearl!" said her lover, hotly. "Seek the poor girl!—restore her to you if possible? Yes, that I will do willingly; but marry her, never! What dark mystery is hidden by that desecrated grave, that empty coffin, I know not! But this I do know—that a woman over whose life so strange a mystery broods is no wife for Laurence Fane!"

"It is your duty," cried Marguerite, bravely, drawing her hand from his arm, and looking at him steadily in the dim light. "That poor girl is evidently but the victim of some black treachery. I believe you love me now, but remember how passionately you loved her once." Her sweet voice was broken as she recalled the anguish of the past years. "Happiness will come if you do your duty; and I—I can bear anything if you are happy!"

"I don't believe it," cried Lance, passionately. "I have known plenty of men who have sacrificed all for false notions of duty and honor—men who have been miserable—and I will not follow their example. I love you! I loved you first, but the glamour of Daisy's beauty was so strong. I have been a weak fool, but at least I know my own mind now; and," cried Lance, catching the girl in his arms, his lips pressed to her pale cheek, while loudly against his bosom he felt every beat of her passionate heart, "I decline to give you up. I never knew, my Pearl, how dearly I loved you till the past days of this happy summer, which we have spent in these dim woodlands alone, and how supremely happy they have been! Do you think I will ever consent to marry any other woman? No, love; I am yours now and forever! Can you not be happy with me, Pearl?" he whispered, tenderly.

And she replied, catching her breath with a sob, "Ah, how unspeakably happy, Lance!"

"Be happy then, my sweetest," cried her lover, "if the passionate devotion of a good-for-nothing fellow like myself can make you so; but never ask me to give you up, Pearl, for that I will never do. To-morrow I will go to New York and use every effort in my power to find poor Daisy, and to unravel the dark mystery of her abduction—for such I believe, on my soul, it was. I cannot think the poor girl would willingly have deserted us all, though I know she loved another man far better than she ever did me."

Marguerite looked at him keenly as he spoke; he was pale to the very lips, and an ominous glitter in his eyes threatened ill for the safety of the person, whoever he was, that had brought sorrow upon Daisy Vaughan.

And so they paced slowly through the woodland paths, while the moon rose higher in the purple heavens, and the stars gleamed out one by one above them; and wrapped in her lover's arms, his fond voice sounding in her ear, Marguerite was inexpressibly content, and yielding herself to the bliss of the hour, she forbore to urge Laurence to sacrifice himself to a mistaken sense of duty.

And on her lover's arm she leant,
And round her waist she felt it fold;
And far across the hills they went,
In that new world which is the old."

CHAPTER X.

ONCE AGAIN.

A NEGLECTED, poverty-struck garden; rank, grassy lawns, overgrown with tangled shrubs and shapeless flower-beds; rugged, unpruned trees closing in on every side, and preventing all save a brief glimpse of the smiling May sky, flecked with tiny white cloudlets.

A high, dilapidated wall closed in the dreary garden, with huge, rusty iron gates opening upon a vast undulating park-like meadow, far off might be seen the splendid beech woods

for which that part of the State is so celebrated.

The old manor-house which St. John Trevor had inherited from his dead mother stood in the midst of the neglected garden—a stately old building, yet with a dreary and mournful aspect about its broken and uncurtained windows that was unspeakably depressing.

Around the house ran a paved colonnade, upon which all the doors and windows opened; the great entrance hall, and dim, empty, half-furnished apartments seemed full of some nameless horror, though the place was not without a certain weird, mournful beauty of its own. The windows of a large sitting-room shadowed with a tangle of unpruned "Gloire de Dijon" roses, were open, and a flight of crumbling, moss-grown steps led down to what had once been a stately bowling-green, closed in by a high ivy-clad wall.

Facing restlessly to and fro the deserted alley was a lady—young, and, oh, how beautiful! though there was a sad and mournful expression upon her face; a twitching of the lovely lips; a restless, vacant look in the dark eyes, inexpressibly sad to see. It was Daisy Vaughan.

The years that had passed since she was conveyed from her home had left their sad traces behind them, and few of her old friends would have recognized the brilliant, beautiful coquette in the saddened, weary woman who wandered so listlessly in that neglected garden.

Everything had been done that was possible to make her happy, but all in vain; it seemed quite impossible to arouse her from her deep dejection, and the doctors and her attendants had almost despaired. But the unfortunate girl was not fated to drift into hopeless madness.

When hope was almost over, she rallied unexpectedly, and though at times the lost, pitiful look would return to her eyes, still her nerves had recovered the shock of her abduction, and her mind regained by slow degrees its wonted power.

The servants whom St. John Trevor had left in charge of her wrote to inform their master of her improved state of health, and he was hourly expected at the old manor-house.

As Daisy walked slowly along under the arching trees, she was trying vainly to recall the past; and as often as she thus tried, the pained, puzzled look flashed from her eyes, and dim and indistinct memories of bygone days were all she could conjure up. A step sounded behind her, and, hastily turning round, she found herself face to face with St. John Trevor. A crimson flush dyed her pale cheek; she made one hasty step forward.

"St. John!" she cried; and then the sight of him recalled the almost forgotten past, and she exclaimed, "Oh, why have you come here? Could you not leave me in peace? Have you not wrought woe enough upon me?"

"Daisy," cried St. John, passionately, as he caught her in his arms, "forgive me my villainy; it sprung from my love for you. I could not stand by and see you the wife of Laurence Fane, for I knew well that it was I whom you loved, not the man to whom you had promised your hand. You were never made for each other; but you and I were. Why did you pretend the cruel farce of acting love to Colonel Fane, while all the time, with every beat of our strong, passionate hearts, you and I loved each other? There was neither sense nor reason in it, Daisy, except—"

"Except the marriage vows which bind you to your ill-fated wife, St. John!" rejoined Daisy, with a pallid little smile, more agonizing far to behold than tears. "You forget those sacred vows sworn at the altar to the woman who has never forfeited the right to bear your name. You forget her, and you insult me by these frenzied words of love. Look at the wreck I am, to which your ill-omened love has reduced me! Stolen from home, my name disgraced, my friends alienated from me! Oh, St. John!"—extending her trembling hands to her guilty lover with a burst of bitter weeping—"restore me to my home, explain my long

absence, and earn for ever my pardon, my gratitude!"

"Restore you to the arms of Laurence Fane, you mean, Daisy," rejoined Trevor, moodily, looking down, as he spoke, upon the fragile girl beside him with eyes in which all the passions of a strong undisciplined spirit smoldered, ready to blaze forth at a word.

That word soon was spoken.

"What if I do wish to return to Laurence Fane?" cried Daisy. "Can I help contrasting his true, honest affection with yours? Your love is like a flame, consuming all it touches; while his—"

"Aha!" replied Trevor, with bitter rancor; "so my love appears worthless to you compared with his; but let me tell you, Daisy, that while I have been wandering to and fro upon the face of the earth for the last two years, your image always beside me, on the wide ocean, in the pathless forests, in the lonely jungle, amid every scene of dissipation and gayety, your other lover, the immaculate Colonel Fane, has been comforting himself for your loss in the society of your cousin Marguerite, and—"

"It is false!—it is false!" cried Daisy, in her clear, ringing voice. "Laurence would never forget me so quickly; Marguerite would never be so base."

"Daisy," pleaded St. John, in those low, caressing tones which had caused so many female hearts to beat and tremble—"Daisy, listen to me, my darling! I have loved you so dearly, I would sacrifice all for your sake—my name, my home, my honor—if needs were. Can you not sacrifice a little for me? I know you love me. Ah, your looks confess what your cruel words would fain deny! Have you no memories of the days that are gone, when we wandered among the old woods of Trevor? Ah, how supremely blessed, because we were together! Put your little hand in mine, love, and let us leave this cold land for brighter skies, where no one will know us. Think of all I have gone through—my wretched life, wrecked at the onset by no fault of mine! Daisy, give me a little happiness, a little love! Child, I will love you as woman never was beloved before! Come with me, Daisy!"—throwing his arm round her, and striving to clasp her to his wildly-beating heart.

Many a better woman than Daisy was would have hesitated—perhaps have been lost; but she only replied, coldly drawing herself away from his incircling arms, "Mr. Trevor, I thought you were too much of a gentleman to seek to press unwelcome attentions on any lady, much less on one who is so completely in your power. Restore me to my home, to my friends; acknowledge the cruel treachery of your conduct to me, and leave me to find peace, if possible; to conquer my sorrow, and to live as best I can the remainder of the dismal life which your wild, undisciplined love has blighted."

These cold, bitter words fell like drops of molten lead upon St. John Trevor's heart, and, forgetting prudence in the rage that filled his soul, he cried out:

"Restore you to your home, Daisy? That is out of my power. You have no place left on earth but in one despairing heart. Long since has the turf grown green and the violets blossomed over the grave where they laid the empty coffin in which they deemed your golden head rested! No; I never will restore you to your home! You belong to me. I have waded deep in guilt and treachery for your sake, and think you I will give you up to sit by Colonel Fane's hearth, and watch your cousin's happiness! Choose between me and a life-long solitude, for, by the bright heaven above us, I swear that you shall never leave this house unless you leave it by my side!"

Very pale indeed grew Daisy's cheek, and she answered:

"Be it so then, St. John. I choose a life-long captivity. How gladly I would have been your wife I think you know, but I will never

commit a sin to gain my life's happiness. Farewell!"

And, turning from her lover, Daisy slowly and wearily took her way up the grass-grown steps, and disappeared beneath the shadow of the rose-decked colonnade.

CHAPTER XI.

FREE.

THE deepening shades of evening were falling over the grand old woods of Trevor Hall; the birds were flying home to their nests, and the deep peace of a sultry summer night was brooding over all the fair land. The stately bowers of the old mansion stood out clear against the purple hills and forest trees, as it had stood for many a year of storm and calm; while, within the walls, a life that had been passed in bitterness and gloom was slowly ebbing away.

Very painless, very calm was that dying bed; the stormy passions, the cruel madness alike were over; and white and wasted, but "clothed and in her right mind," the unhappy wife of St. John Trevor was passing into the silent land.

Hastily summoned by telegraph, her husband stood by her side watching the labored breath, the pinched and careworn features of the woman upon whose face he had not looked for nearly twenty years, and whom he remembered so beautiful and so beloved.

The windows of the splendid apartment were flung open, and the perfumed night air stirred the costly lace draperies, and fanned the pale cheek of the dying woman. So still was all within the room that the deep, tuneful murmur of the river might be plainly heard as it glided along far beneath the windows.

The sight of the cruel havoc wrought in his wife by the fell disease to which she had been so long a victim roused all the better part of St. John Trevor's nature, and tears, that were no disgrace to his manhood, glittered in his dark, weary eyes.

Through the long hours of that summer night he lived over again the past years of his life; he recalled the proud hour when he had brought his beautiful young wife a bride to Trevor Hall. And hark! again that shriek, so weird, so full of woe, sounded in his ears, and St. John had some difficulty in assuring himself that that agonizing sound was but heard in imagination.

Hurrying feet seemed again to tread that corridor, and horror-struck voices to announce the fatal tale!

Again he bends over the lace-decked cradle of his murdered heir; again listens with curdling blood to the dreadful shrieks and yet more ghastly laughter of his wretched wife; again he sees that distorted form, those writhing features, as, her white robes stained with blood, her hair hanging over her shoulders, she tries to free herself from the restraining grasp of her frightened servants!

Cold drops of sweat stand thick upon his brow as he lives over again those days of anguish.

A deep sigh; his own name softly murmured in tones he thought never again to hear, and St. John Trevor is leaning over the bed, holding the cold hands of his wife in his warm clasp and listening to her feeble voice.

"St. John," she mutters, as her dim eyes fix themselves upon that dark, beloved face, "I thought I had lost you; it was but a dream, love. I am very tired—kiss me—good-night," trying to place her wasted arms round his neck.

One sigh, one faint fluttering breath, and the weary lids droop over the blue eyes, the feeble arms release their hold, and it is a dead woman whom St. John lays down tenderly upon the lace-trimmed pillows.

Maud Trevor's weary life is over, and St. John is free!

With tossing plumes, with crape clad mourners, with the carriages of half the country following in the rear, they lay Maud Trevor in her grave.

Brilliant sunbeams gleam down upon the

flower-decked pall; again the ancient vault in Weston churchyard is opened, and the coffin of the unfortunate Maud is placed beside the tiny one in which sleeps the long-buried heir.

The solemn tones of the clergyman fall upon the ear as he reads the concluding words of the burial service; and slowly the crowd depart from the churchyard, leaving the broken heart to its quiet rest.

And ere the night falls St. John Trevor has left that splendid home, which for long years had been to him but a grave, and is speeding south to seek Daisy in that lonely manor-house, eager to clasp her to his passionate heart, and by the devotion of his life make amends to her for all she has suffered.

The rays of the same setting sun which, shining into the stately bed-chamber at Trevor Hall, tinged the pallid cheek of the dying woman, and gleamed upon the haggard countenance of the watcher by that bed of death, shone redly into Daisy Vaughan's apartment in the far-off manor-house, where the young girl was impatiently pacing to and fro, ever and anon looking anxiously at the sinking sun, and longing with an impatient, heart-sick longing for darkness and solitude.

To analyze the feelings which possessed the soul of the unhappy girl would be a difficult task.

Fear, anger, indignation fought for mastery, and through it all ran the deathless love, the indomitable pride which would never be quenched on this side the grave.

So lovely, so desolate, so cruelly tempted, nothing remained to Daisy but flight.

She determined to take this opportunity of St. John Trevor's absence and leave the old mansion where she had spent such weary hours.

In New York she would find a secure hiding-place, and though she had no money, she possessed an abundance of valuable jewels which might easily be converted into cash.

"Be the day weary, be the day long.

At last it wingeth to even-song."

And slowly the red sun sunk in the west—slowly the bright stars came out one by one in the deep purple vault of heaven, and at last Daisy realized that her hour of escape was at hand. She had formed no plans for her midnight journey—to get away was all she cared for; she did not even know in what county her prison-house was situated.

She intended to leave the old mansion when all its inhabitants were wrapped in slumber, and to walk through the perfumed darkness of the summer night until she reached a village or town where she might obtain money for some of her jewels, and from whence she might take train to New York.

This plan, at the best crude and badly arranged, was the best she could devise, and the brave spirit inherited from her ancestors was undaunted by difficulties or dangers. Come what might, she determined she would no longer remain a prisoner under the roof of the man whom she loved and dreaded.

Dressing herself in a gown of black cashmere, she placed her jewels and a few necessities in a small traveling-bag, took her fur coat and a dark straw hat in her hand, and unheard, unseen, glided down the bare, echoing staircase, along the empty, gloomy hall, and gently unclosing the window of her sitting-room, glided out into the dusky garden with a wildly beating heart.

Safe!—free!

At the same moment that Daisy stood alone under the star-lit sky, St. John Trevor turned away from the bed where the unfortunate Maud lay hushed in her eternal slumber, his heart beating thick and fast as he realized that now there was no bar to his happiness, no reason why the soft, seductive beauty of the woman he adored should not be his own forever!

CHAPTER XII.

HOMELESS!—HOUSELESS!—HELPLESS!

THE events narrated in my last chapter had taken place some time before Mr. Griffiths had

been startled by what he imagined to be the ghost of a dead woman's face in the streets of New York!

We have seen how Laurence Fane caused the grave of his dead love to be opened, and how Marguerite bore the shock of that gruesome announcement, and we have now to follow the gallant soldier in his search for the lost Daisy. Colonel Fane had an objection to advertising Daisy, and a still greater dislike to apply to those inquiry offices which set forth such tempting advertisements in the morning papers.

He hated the idea of making the tale of treachery and wrong-doing public property; his proud soul revolted at the idea of Daisy's name—the name borne by his future wife—being bandied about by detective police officers and jeered over by club-room scandal-mongers.

So he set to work unaided to find the lost girl; but he was by no means a man gifted with those qualities most needed for following up so obscure a search.

Indomitable resolution and boldness he possessed, but not the sleuth-hound patience, the watchful vigilance, which would alone have helped him.

And so the dreary days went slowly by, endured how impatiently none save himself knew.

Those hot autumn days passed in aimless wanderings up and down the desolate streets and dusty pavements, when he longed to be following the partridges over the breezy, purple mountains, fishing in the deep, still pools amid the lovely hills, or riding through the delicious scenery of his home, with Marguerite by his side.

The year was closing in before Laurence quite lost faith and hope in himself and acknowledged the truth, that nature had not fitted him to play the amateur detective officer; and one dreary November morning, as he was strolling down the broad walk of one of the public parks, while the yellowing leaves dropped from the trees, he made up his mind to consult his old friend Mr. Griffiths, whose advice he had hitherto resolutely refused to follow.

Laurence strode along, with a moody frown upon his genial face, his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his rough tweed shooting jacket, dejected, weary, and, truth to say, cross.

"Confound it!" he said to himself; "I shall never find Daisy. It's not my line at all, this hunting in holes and corners for the poor girl; it would suit me better to meet Trevor face to face, and take the scoundrel by the throat and shake the truth out of him, as a terrier shakes a rat. I'll write a line to Griffiths to-night and ask him what I had better do; for, by Jove! a little more of this sort of thing would kill me."

Colonel Fane was as good as his word; and after dining at his club that evening, he wrote a line to the worthy agent, acknowledging the utter fruitlessness of his search, and begging his old friend's advice and assistance.

An answer from his old friend reached him by return of post, the contents of which greatly surprised him.

It was as follows:

WESTON, November 20th.

DEAR COLONEL FANE:

Your letter safely received. I will be with you on the 23d instant, accompanied by Miss Vaughan, who has taken board in New York for a few weeks, and who does me the honor of accepting my escort to town. And so you have found it difficult to sink the soldier in the spy? Did I not tell you you were not fitted for the task? Yours faithfully,

G. GRIFFITHS.

And so Marguerite had determined to aid in the search for her lost cousin.

Laurence greatly rejoiced at the news, feeling that her quick woman's wit and brave, hopeful patience would be a very tower of strength to him.

It was a gloomy November evening, with a drizzling rain slowly falling, when Colonel Fane, buttoned up in his ulster, sallied forth to the Central Railroad Depot to meet the travelers, and joyfully he banded Marguerite from the carriage, looking with all a lover's fond pride

at the dainty figure clothed in brown cloth and darkest sealskin and sables, the tender, high-bred face set off by the Gainsborough hat of brown felt, with its sweeping plumes.

"I suppose I may go with you to your boarding-place, Pearl?" he asked, after he had pressed the little hand of his darling tenderly in his broad palm and greeted his kindly friend.

"Of course you may, Lance," the girl replied; "and then you shall tell us the results of your search, and what plans you have pursued to find Daisy."

"Plans, my dear girl!" replied her lover; "why, I have been trying all sorts of schemes ever since I left Weston. I give you my word, Griffiths," he added, turning to the agent, "that I have not left one place of amusement unvisited. I have sat out every play in New York, I believe; have attended almost every church; have paraded up and down the Markets in the faint hope of meeting the flower-girl whom I believe you mistook for Daisy; but without the slightest success. Of course," he continued, gloomily, "in the face of facts—the empty grave, the long and strange absence—it would be idle not to acknowledge the presence of some dark mystery, but I do not believe Daisy is in the city. Some chance likeness misled you, and led to our strange discovery; but I firmly believe Trevor has taken her out of the country. Base as he is, he would never have left her unprotected and unprovided for."

"And I differ with you," said Marguerite, in her clear, firm tones. "I believe it was Daisy whom Mr. Griffiths saw. If Mr. Trevor took her from her home, I am sure it was by some fraud or force—she never willingly left us to live a life of dishonor. And what so likely that she contrived to make her escape? I feel sure we shall find her—homeless, friendless, destitute, perhaps; disgraced, never!"

"Well, Marguerite, you may be right," said Colonel Fane; "but what plan do you propose to adopt to find Daisy?"

"The first thing I shall do to-morrow morning, Lance," rejoined Marguerite, "is to go to the place where Mr. Griffiths saw Daisy—"

"Or her double," here put in the colonel, dryly.

But Pearl continued, without noticing her lover's remark, "And make inquiries of the old apple-woman whom our friend saw sitting at her stall near where Daisy was selling her flowers"—with a bitter sigh. "She will most likely know something about her; and, depend upon it, we shall gain some information."

"What a clever girl you are, Marguerite!" said her lover, looking at her bright, earnest face in the deepest admiration. "Do you know, such an idea as interviewing the apple-woman would never have presented itself to my mind."

"I dare say not," said Marguerite, smiling; "women's wits are generally sharper than those of the lords of the creation; and I never, for my part, had the faintest hope that you would find poor Daisy."

The next morning Laurence Fane called at Marguerite's boarding-place to escort her on the first stage of their voyage of discovery. He was accompanied by his old friend Mr. Griffiths, in order, as the latter forcibly expressed himself, to prevent the colonel making a muddle of the whole affair.

They found Marguerite, who possessed the rare virtue of punctuality, ready dressed, and busily occupied in buttoning the manifold buttons of her gloves, and they were soon in the street and on their way.

The bank was reached, and Marguerite's keen glance rested at once upon an old apple-woman dozing at her stall, whereon were arranged oranges, apples, and chestnuts.

Advancing toward her she said, in her gentle, high-bred tones:

"I have come to ask you a few questions about a friend of mine. Have you time to attend to me now?"

The old woman looked quickly at the beautiful, well-dressed woman who so courteously addressed her, as she replied:

"A friend of yours, my lady? I don't know what ye mean—surely it's joking ye are?"

"No, I am not joking," replied Marguerite, gently. "I have for some time lost sight of a dear friend of mine, and I have been told that she has been seen selling flowers close to your stall."

"Why, then, ma'am, I know whom you mean now," said the old woman, with a curious glance at the young lady. "It's a pretty girl, with long, lovely hair; quite like a lady she was, poor thing! Ah, but it was a hard life for the likes of that pretty creature; bad enough for me, but awful for any one who'd been better brought up. She lodged at the place where I live, and—"

"Oh!" cried Marguerite, clasping her hands impulsively, "tell me where she lives."

"Stop a bit, miss!" said the old woman, a shrewd twinkle in her keen blue Irish eyes. "I'll be afther asking what you want with the poor thing? I promised her faithful that if any one ever asked me about her I'd keep her secrets; and so I will, the poor darlint!"

"See here, my good woman," said Colonel Fane, "it's nothing but good we wish to thank your young lady; surely you will never keep the secret of her whereabouts if it's to do her an injury?"

"I don't want to do her any harm, poor creature!" rejoined the Irishwoman; "and 'deed, sir, she's bad off enough—no money to keep her, and dying, too, I'm afraid."

"Dying!" cried Marguerite, in an agony. "Oh, for mercy's sake, take me to her! I am her cousin—her only relative. See!" pulling out her purse, and pouring its glittering contents into the old woman's withered hand; "here is money for you, if you will only do as I ask you."

"Is it a Judas ye take me for, ma'am?" said the Irishwoman. "Take back your money. I would not betray the poor thing that trusts me for untold gold. I had a fine gentleman here yesterday trying to bribe me; but I gave him the same answer as I gave you."

"Good Heaven!" cried Colonel Fane, "that must have been Trevor. What is to be done, Marguerite? It will never do to have him on her track."

"See here, colonel, and you, too, Miss Vaughan," said Griffiths; "it will be easy enough to find the young lady now. This good woman tells us she lodges at the same house. Well, a policeman will soon find out where that is."

"Is it a cop you're afther sending for, sir?" said the apple-woman. "Bad luck to you, then! I'm an honest woman, and want none o' them at my lodgings. I'll take the young lady there myself, as I think she means no harm to the poor girl."

"Oh, thank you!" cried Marguerite gratefully. "Can you come now?"

"'Deed and I can't, ma'am," the other answered. "You must wait till evening, and then I'll take you."

And finding the woman was resolute, Marguerite was forced to content herself; and, accompanied by Laurence and Mrs. Griffiths, she returned to her lodgings.

Pitiless, driving rain, a chill northeast wind blowing, and the muddy streets of the city looking especially dreary as seen by the light of the gas-lamp, a hack containing Marguerite and Colonel Fane drew up to the side of the pavement, and Laurence hurriedly descended from the vehicle and repaired to the stall of the Irish apple-woman.

The old lady, calmly smoking a short black pipe, was seated under a huge umbrella, and putting the pipe in the pocket of the man's pilot jacket which she wore, announced herself ready to go with Colonel Fane.

After assisting the woman into the cab Colonel Fane followed her, and they were soon driving through the streets of the busy city.

Marguerite was in a perfect fever of impatience as the cab jingled and rattled over the stones.

At last it paused before a shabby house in a

dull, half-lighted street, and their conductor informed them that they had reached their destination.

"Keep up your courage, my darling!" said Laurence fondly, pressing closer to his side, as he spoke, the trembling little hand which rested on his arm, and together they entered the house where the unhappy Daisy had taken refuge.

CHAPTER XIII.

PAST HOPE—PAST HELP—PAST EVERYTHING!

"Go up that staircase to the second story back," said the old woman, who had acted as their guide.

And leaning on Laurence's arm, Marguerite ascended the dark, dilapidated staircase, the boards of which were loose in several places, and the railings broken away.

"What an awful place!" whispered Laurence.

And Marguerite said, "Hush, Lance! Is not some one speaking in the room which the woman said was Daisy's?"

A deep, musical voice, trembling with suppressed passion, broke upon their ears, and Laurence, exclaiming "Good heavens! it is that villain Trevor!" dropped Marguerite's hand, and would have rushed into the room, but the young woman stopped him.

"Stay, Laurence!" she said, her sweet voice broken with emotion. "Remember how ill the poor darling is! We must do nothing to agitate her. Mr. Trevor can do her no harm now. Be patient a little while."

And yielding to the gentle, restraining touch, Laurence stood silently upon the miserable landing, outside the door of the room where the tragedy of Daisy's brief life was rapidly drawing to a close.

A sweet, feeble voice was speaking slowly and with difficulty.

"Is that you, St. John. Have you come to see me die?"

Trevor was beside her in a moment, holding the poor trembling little hands in his own strong, warm clasp, looking down in anguish unspeakable upon the wan, hectic face—never, in all its glorious beauty, dearer to him than now.

Her eyes had been closed; but by and-by the white lids were raised, and she lifted them in all their dark splendor to his face; and they rested there longingly, anxiously; their brilliancy quenched, their beauty dimmed by many tears, but their love unchangeable—unchanged.

The horrible past, with its sad story of guilt and treachery, was in mercy withheld from her memory.

Only her deep abiding love to St. John Trevor was present to her mind, and she heaved a quiet sigh of supreme content as she saw him standing there, regarding her with the old adoring glances which she so well remembered.

"Have you forgotten me, St. John?" she asked, in sad, yearning tones.

St. John had hitherto been kept silent by the cruel sight of his darling lying there in her sordid room—her poor, scanty garments, her wan, white face mutely reproaching him for all the sorrows he had made her suffer; now her plaintive words unlocked the fountains of his grief, and the silence of the room was broken by a strong man's agonized sobs.

"Don't, St. John!" urged Daisy, in her frail, low tones, laying her little wasted hand upon his bowed head, which he had turned on the tattered patchwork coverlet of her bed; "don't fret for me, darling! It is better so. I could not live without you, and it is much better as it is."

"Oh, my darling!" cried the unhappy man, lifting his dark, haggard eyes to the face of the woman whom he had so madly, fatally loved. "Don't talk about leaving me just when I am free—free to win your hand, as I long ago won your heart! I will take you from this horrid

place, love, and under sunny skies we will live for each other, and, forgetting the sorrows of our past, be all-in-all to each other!"

"Too late, St. John!" rejoined Daisy, languidly laying her fluttering fingers very tenderly upon the dark head, so thickly streaked with silver, which rested against her pillow,—"too late, darling! I cannot live for you; I can but die for you!" she murmured low. "I have loved you so passionately, with the love that was my doom, and now I am leaving you forever, my poor St. John!"

The tone was so low, so broken, that Trevor started up in affright; and perceiving that Daisy was very pale, and that the heavy lids were closing over her eyes, he called hastily for help, while he raised her in his arms, pillowing her head upon his aching heart—that heart that would hereafter be forever empty of woman's love, and which would respond, ah! never more, to woman's caresses.

A quick step upon the bare floor, a ringing, authoritative voice pronouncing his name, caused Trevor to raise his eyes from their anxious contemplation of Daisy's face; and starting as if he had received a sudden blow, he found himself face to face with Marguerite Vaughan and Laurence Fane, those two confiding, trusting friends whom he had so basely deceived.

But St. John Trevor was no coward. Raising his haughty head, he said, coldly, "What brings you here, Colonel Fane? I am perfectly able to care for my promised wife without your assistance."

"We come to rescue your victim, Trevor!" said Laurence sternly. "Excuses, lies, subterfuges, will avail you nothing. Miss Vaughan has come to take her cousin home, and no power on earth shall stop us!"

"I will stop you, Colonel Fane!" rejoined Trevor. "Daisy is my promised wife."

"Your promised wife, you most consummate villain!" cried Fane, unable any longer to restrain his righteous indignation. "What a place to find the future wife of the owner of Trevor Hall. No; we have found the helpless victim of your abominable treachery sick unto death in such a den as this, and you think to turn our wrath aside by so shallow an excuse. Do not be afraid, Daisy," striding as he spoke toward the bed, and speaking tenderly to the poor girl, who had opened her dark eyes, and was gazing in terrified amazement at the scene before her. "I have come to take you home. Marguerite is here; and—and—"

Marguerite could control herself no longer; and rushing forward, she clasped the wasted form of the once lovely girl to her faithful heart, looking down with grief unspeakable upon the pallid cheeks and sunken eyes of her whom she had last seen in the glory of her peerless beauty.

"Pearl!—my darling Pearl!" sighed the poor girl; "do we meet again? I cannot recall the past, dear; it seems to slip from my memory; but I lost you, darling! It is so confused, I can see only one beloved face that it was a sin to think of—a sin to gaze upon; so I thrust it away; Pearl—I tore it from my heart, which has bled to death for lack of it!"

"Hush! love! hush!" cried Pearl, soothing the poor girl as if she were a wailing child. "Surely my love is strong enough to banish that dark past forever from your memory? Cannot you find peace again in your old home? It is ever open to receive you, whatsoever have been the faults and errors of the past."

And now a deep, clear voice broke in: "Daisy has committed no faults, no errors, Miss Vaughan. From first to last, she has been a victim to cruel treachery—to foulest wrong. I alone am guilty; and"—flinging back his haughty head—"I am ready to answer for my conduct to Colonel Fane, whenever he wishes it."

"Will blood-shedding undo the past?" asked Marguerite, very sternly. "Will the sacrifice of your life or Colonel Fane's bring back the bloom to Daisy's cheek, the light to her eyes? Could it restore to us that kind old man, who died almost heart broken? No, Mr. Trevor, do

not add to your guilt; leave this poor girl to me, and take the blighting influence of your presence from her life. I will protect her; you but add to her misery."

"Is it so, Daisy?" asked St. John, advancing toward the bed and kneeling down by the side of the dying girl. "Do you indeed desire me to leave you?—because, love, if you but say the word, I will go, never to trouble you again. Do you forget that day, long, hateful years ago, when I wandered beside you in the pine wood at Trevor? I loved you then, when my passion was almost more than I could endure, and when we were separated by the one barrier that I could not break, and of which—coward that I was!—I dared not speak. Oh, Daisy, my life has been one long anguish of suffering; but, cruel though it has been, this is the last, worst blow that Fate can deal me, to be sent from you by your own free will, now, when there is no stern, dark presence to forbid our union!"

He ceased, and stood calmly beside her, watching to see which was strongest—the old influence of her cousin's presence, or the lifelong love which she had given him.

Very silent was the sick-room.

Marguerite's tears were pouring fast down her cheeks; an unwonted moisture dimmed Laurence Fane's keen hazel eyes; and St. John could hear the loud throbs of his own aching, undisciplined heart when Daisy tried to raise herself upon her pillows, and, holding out the fragile arms, softly breathed her lover's name.

"Take me home, St. John," she murmured low, "for, oh, I am so tired!"

At the sound of her plaintive voice, tears fell from eyes long unused to weep.

Then he stooped his proud head, and gathering close to his breast the form of the woman he loved, he pressed upon her lips a kiss, long, fond and passionate; and as he did so, all the long darkness and despair of her past life vanished as if by magic, and Daisy realized that, whether she lived or died, her sorrows were forever over, swallowed up in the deep abiding love of the man whom she might now love without shame.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Alas for the love that loves alway!"

"I DARE not ask your pardon, Miss Vaughan," said Trevor, humbly, when the weary girl had fallen asleep, with her golden head resting upon his breast, and Colonel Fane had departed to bring a celebrated physician to see the sufferer.

A fire was burning in the rusty grate, and Marguerite had contrived, with a little assistance from the landlady, to infuse a look of comfort into the miserable room, greatly at variance with its usual aspect.

Marguerite raised her earnest eyes to St. John's haggard countenance, and asked, gently, "What is my pardon worth? Mr. Trevor, can you forgive yourself?"

A heavy sigh was his only answer.

And Marguerite continued, "I know that your own heart is your accuser; I know that each proof of my poor cousin's love must wring your guilty heart! You have killed her—"

Here Marguerite broke down into bitter weeping.

And Trevor exclaimed, in horror-struck tones, "Miss Vaughan, you cannot mean it! She is ill, my poor darling, but care, devotion, all that love can do, shall be done to restore her to health, and then we will be quietly married, and I will take her abroad to a lovely villa I have upon the shores of the Lake of Como. It shall be my one thought to repay her for all the anguish I have caused her to suffer."

"Vain dreams—futile plans, Mr. Trevor!" rejoined Marguerite, sadly. "Daisy is dying—of that I am certain. Years of sorrow, followed up by exposure to cold and want, insufficient food, poor clothes, hardships of every kind—oh, my poor little Daisy!—have done their worst. It is nearly over now. Thank God, I came in time to see her once more."

St. John Trevor dropped the white hand of Marguerite, which he had caught in his agitation, and turned away, with a bitter groan.

"My God," he muttered, in low heart-rung accents, "I never dreamed of this! Oh, my poor, poor Daisy!"

Marguerite's womanly sympathies were aroused by the anguish of the desponding tones; and, bitterly as she resented St. John's treachery and duplicity, it was not in her nature to see any sorrow without trying to alleviate it; so, steadying her voice with an effort, she said, kindly, "Do not grieve so bitterly, Mr. Trevor. Sorrow cannot recall the past. Our poor girl has pardoned you; and though it would be wrong to conceal the truth that you have been guilty of a base and cruel sin, still, deep and true repentance will atone for the greatest crime and deadliest error."

And as she spoke she extended her hand to the broken-hearted man before her.

Trevor took it reverently in his, and pressing it, said, in a faltering voice, "You are an angel of goodness, Miss Vaughan; but though my Daisy and you have pardoned me, I can never forgive myself."

Steps on the stairs announced the return of Colonel Fane and the arrival of the doctor resident in the neighborhood whom he had gone to summon.

In a moment more they entered, and the medical man, as he advanced into the room, paused in surprise at the sight before him.

A shadowy, whitewashed apartment, the one window uncurtained and unshuttered; a small fire burning in the rusty grate; the only furniture a deal table and a couple of chairs; the low iron bedstead covered with its patchwork quilt, upon which the form of the sufferer was restlessly tossing.

Marguerite, her high-bred beauty and quiet elegance of costume, standing by the side of the tall, distinguished man, whose eyes were so full of unutterable woe, that even the doctor, used as he was to scenes of suffering, wondered what had caused the strong man's anguish.

A few quiet words to Marguerite, and he turned to examine the condition of the patient.

Very grave grew his expression ere the scrutiny was ended, and then he turned to Marguerite, asking, "You are a relative?"

"Yes, her cousin," said the young woman, with white and trembling lips.

"I am sorry to say that the case is utterly hopeless," he said, kindly. "I can do nothing for her now; a few hours will see the end."

"Can I not take her home? Can I do nothing?" cried Marguerite in agony.

"All human aid is unavailing now," said the doctor, gravely. "To disturb her would only cause instant death." And with a few words of sympathy to the watchers by that bed of death, he left the room.

The strangely-assorted companions watched Daisy's restless slumbers through the weary hours of that winter night, and while the first pale gleam of dawn was striving to pierce through the dingy window panes, the sufferer opened her eyes.

Colonel Fane had looked on death too often not to see that its approach was at hand, and he bent down over the dying girl and spoke soothingly to her; but it was not Laurence of whom she thought in that supreme moment.

"St. John!" she whispered, in faltering tones; and tenderly Trevor lifted her slight form in his strong arms, and laid her weary head upon his breast. Few and low were the words spoken by those dying lips, unheard save by St. John. Presently she shivered in her lover's strong, warm clasp, and murmured low, "I am so tired—oh, so tired, St. John! Life has been so weary; take me home!"

And she went home!

It was a clear, cold day in December when three mourners stood by the side of an open grave in Weston churchyard, and listened, amid choking sobs, to the solemn words which consigned the remains of Daisy Vaughan to the tomb.

The story of the unhappy girl had been a nine days' wonder in the neighborhood, and created a great sensation through the country for miles around.

With bated breath, people talked the strange mystery over, and shook their heads solemnly when St. John Trevor's name was mentioned, but the true state of affairs was never revealed.

It was soon evident that the presence of his mad wife had not been the only bar to his residence at Trevor Hall; for now that that barrier was removed, he showed no inclination to inhabit his ancestral halls.

Everything was to be left, as of old, in the charge of Mr. Griffiths and the trusted servants, and St. John Trevor was about to depart upon a lengthened tour through the Holy Land. Vainly did Mr. Griffiths plead, vainly even did Colonel Fane beseech the unhappy man to remain at home, and do his duty by himself and his neighbors.

Trevor was resolute.

"I could not remain here," he told Laurence. "I should be forever haunted by her dark eyes; I should hear her voice in every breeze that blew. Urge me no more, Fane, for I cannot stop at Trevor."

And seeing that it was impossible to shake his determination, Laurence said no more.

At St. John's request, Colonel Fane took Marguerite to Trevor Hall once before its master's departure, and for the first time the young woman entered those stately walls where Daisy might have ruled, and been a happy bride had not Death claimed her as his prey.

Laurence conducted Marguerite to the magnificent library, where a broken, care-worn man, his life's happiness crumbled into ruins at his feet, was slowly pacing to and fro, the winter sunshine streaming in vivid patches of purple, crimson, and orange through the stained glass of the oriel windows, and lighting up the somber melancholy of his dark, haughty countenance.

Marguerite glanced around her curiously as she entered. Everywhere were the signs, not only of lavish wealth, but of refined and cultivated taste.

Round the room were placed large book-cases of rich carved oak, the volumes bound in white vellum and gold, slightly tarnished by time; above were portraits of the Trevor family, all remarkable for the dark beauty of their countenances, and the haunting, melancholy eyes so noticeable in their descendant.

Stands of exquisite china, rare bronzes, and statues of white marble gleamed out from the dark background of the walls; while the subtle perfume of rare hothouse blossoms made the air heavy with their fragrance.

Sending Marguerite up to the side of the master of the house, Laurence muttered a few hasty words about smoking a cigar in the court-yard, and turning on his heel, quitted the apartment.

What passed between them at that final interview he never knew; the grief of the stricken man was too deep, too full of that canker-worm, remorse, for careless eyes to pry into its agonies.

Marguerite's eyes were wet and her cheeks very pale when Laurence returned to escort her home.

"God bless you, Marguerite!" said St. John Trevor, as he placed in her hand a casket of diamonds of great value. "Will you grant me the favor of wearing these jewels in memory of her whom we both mourn? They were my mother's diamonds, and I shall like to think they are in your possession, when lands and house, wealth and diamonds, are in the hands of my cousin, who is my sole heir. We part now forever; but," brokenly, "remember the wanderer and outcast in your prayers!"

And as Marguerite, with a full heart, uttered her broken words of thanks and farewell, and departed from that stately mansion, she turned round and saw St. John Trevor standing bare-headed in the keen winter wind upon the threshold of his desolate home, alone forevermore!

And so she saw him for the last time!

The lovely flush of spring was over all the fair mountain land, the forest glades were yellow with primroses, blue-eyed violets decked the mossy banks round Trevor with their dainty perfumed blossoms, when a quiet group stood before the altar of the village church.

The sun streaming through the window upon the velvet of the altar cloth lighted up Marguerite Vaughan's pure high-bred face, as in clear, unfaltering tones she pledged her troth to Laurence Fane.

And when the sun sunk to rest, behind the purple mountains, and Marguerite, leaning on her husband's arm, entered the hall of Fairview, the joy, deep, supreme and intense of that moment repaid her for all the years of lonely sorrow, of anxious waiting.

And standing by the great oriel window, looking out into the shadowy, perfumed garden, Marguerite, pressed in her husband's arms, realized that now indeed the sweet dreams were on the eve of fulfillment; that never any more, through spring or summer, autumn or winter, could aught mar the unalloyed, unbroken happiness of the twilight hour.

"Are you content, love?" asked Laurence, in his fond tones, looking down into her fair face, passion-pale in the dim moonlight; and for answer she twined her arms fondly round his neck, drawing his head down upon her faithful bosom, which had never known another love, and pressed upon her husband's lips one long, long kiss.

And Laurence was answered!

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